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MARJORIE ALLEN SEIFFERT, MOLINE POET

William Roba

The major obstacle to understanding this poet is her undeserved obscurity. Marjorie Allen Seiffert wrote four books of verse and more than thirty uncollected poems between 1916 and 1942. She remained a verse experimenter, winning two prestigious prizes from *Poetry,* the most influential periodical for that period: the Guarantor's Prize in 1919 and the Levinson Prize in 1929. Although considered a "minor" or "female" writer by the 1930s, her career and poetry offer insights into a formative period of modern American poetry.

She was one of many women poets who helped to create a distinctive voice in American literature. Some women poets took the support of other women, others worked within traditional networks supported by men. Seiffert was one of the latter group whose traditional marriage did not hinder her friendships or her writing. Although her output was not great, her poetic perspective encompassed the major tendencies of the 1920s.

Marjorie Allen, whose centennial is this year, was born on February 15, 1885. Her maternal grandfather was George Stephens, a leading industrialist in the western Illinois city of Moline. Her mother, well-known as an amateur musician, strongly supported the choral activities at the Episcopalian Church in Moline. Her father, after graduating from the University of Michigan, worked for his father-in-law at the Moline Plow Company. He and his wife belonged to the upper class of society in Moline, and their elegant dinners and parties were part of Marjorie's childhood. She went to a college preparatory school in Chicago, the Loring School, before matriculating at Smith College in 1902. Her mother had graduated from the college, located in Northampton, Massachusetts, shortly after its founding in 1871. In 1905, during her senior year, her father decided to contribute a lasting memorial to his wife and daughter by giving the college a large tract of land for athletic purposes. The Allen Recreation Field was dedicated on May 29, 1906.

Upon returning to Moline, Marjorie lived with her parents in their newly built mansion, "Allendale," high above the downtown business district. The English Tudor manor house became the center of her activities. Into the large household of family and a staff of nine servants, Marjorie settled

into a social routine for the next few years. She attended the monthly meetings of the Women's Club (organized by her mother in 1903 with 140 charter members) which attracted other young women from the entire metropolitan area, including Rock Island in Illinois and Davenport in Iowa. Among the members of the Women's Club were the wife of a young Davenport lawyer, Mrs. Arthur Ficke, and an aspiring novelist and writer, Susan Glaspell.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the metropolitan area of Moline, Rock Island and Davenport, known then as the "Tri-Cities," contained six young writers who were achieving national reputations. Arthur Davison Ficke became well-known for his traditional poetry, and Susan Glaspell had won several prizes for her short stories. Besides these two, George Cram Cook, Harry Hansen, Floyd Dell and Cornelia Lynde Meigs formed a loose aggregation of young writers.[1] They knew each other, and their family backgrounds reflected the mosaic of social classes in the Tri-Cities. Harriet Monroe, founder and editor of the influential magazine *Poetry*, recalled that Marjorie Seiffert "belonged to a super-sophisticated little 'smart set' group . . . [whose] dinners were superlative for food and service, and for quick fencing of witty talk among intimates intellectually up-to-date."[2]

Little changed after she met and married Otto Seiffert, scion of a well-known Davenport family which based its wealth upon lumber interests. "Allendale" was the setting for a brilliant wedding, the evening of January 20, 1910. It was the capstone of the social "season": after the ceremony in the mansion, a wedding supper was catered by Joseph Biggs of Chicago.[3] She soon settled into married life, devoting her time to the demands of a young society wife, and within a few years, to the raising of two children. She and her family lived across the avenue from her father's mansion.[4]

While she was in her late twenties, Marjorie Allen Seiffert started composing music. Her mother had always encouraged and shared Marjorie's musical interest, and it allowed Marjorie a personal activity, in the midst of children and regulated social activities. She had written a number of songs when she showed her compositions to the poet-lawyer, Ficke. As she later recalled, he liked her writing but asked her, "Why don't you forget music and write poetry?"[5] She started turning the lyrics into poetry without changing the household schedule; one of her friends claimed that "social life has not interfered with her work any more than to eliminate afternoon parties."[6] She worked steadily throughout the year, and with Ficke's contacts in publishing, had her first poem accepted for publication. Margaret C. Anderson had become interested in social problems in 1916, and her internationally acclaimed *Little Review* contained Seiffert's "The Picnic."

This poem describes, in blank verse, a day of relaxation for working class youth. Its reflective tone closely parallels a prose version of the

MARJORIE ALLEN SEIFFERT

same type of day which Floyd Dell used in his first novel, *Moon-Calf*.[7] Seiffert opens her poem with a conventional group portrait:

> Here they come, in pairs, carrying baskets,
> Pale clerks with brilliant neckties, and cheap serge suits,
> Steering girls by the arm, clerks, too,
> Pretty and slim and smart,
> Even to yellow kid boots, laced up behind.
>
> They take the electric cars far into the country,
> They descend, gaily chattering, at the Amusement Park.
> Under the trees they eat the lunch they have carried—
> Salad, sausages, sandwiches, candy, warm beer.
> They ride in the roller-coaster, two in a seat,
> (Glorious danger! Warm, delicious proximity!)
> The unaccustomed beer floods their veins like heady wine,
> And smothered youth awakens with shrill screams of joy.[8]

Later on in this poem, Seiffert creates a mood of suppressed yearning to explain the magic in the air.

> Two leave the park and the crowds—the stars shine out,
> A river runs at their feet, behind them, a leafy copse,
> Away on the other shore, the fields of grain
> Lie sleeping peacefully in the starlight.
> Tonight the world is theirs, a legacy
> From those who lived familiar friends with river, field and forest—
> Their forebears.

The magazine soon shifted to other concerns, but it had provided her with an important beginning as a published poet.

Her friendship with Ficke also led her into perpetrating a delightful literary hoax. Ficke and his friend Witter Bynner had concocted an imaginary school of experimental poetry. Calling it the "Spectric" school, they assumed invented identities an Anne Knish and Emmanual Morgan and invited other friends to join them in the hoax. After Edwin Arlington Robinson and Edna St. Vincent Millay had declined the honor, they found themselves in a predicament since the avant garde *Others* had agreed to devote an entire issue to the "Spectric" school. Thus, they persuaded Seiffert to try the style and the result was a new "Spectric" cohort, Elijah Hay. Her efforts were quite successful.

In an enjoyable vein of satire, several Spectric poems by Elijah Hay show the core of playfulness inherent in the hoax. She targeted the society matrons of Moline by referring to them as Mrs. X., Mrs. Z. (whatever became of Mrs. Y.?), and Mrs. Andsoforth. She lambasted the last one in seven lines.

> Old ladies, bless their hearts,
> Are contented as house-flies
> Dozing against the wall.

But you,
Imprisoned in the forties,
Delirious, frenzied, helpless,
Are a fly, drowning in a cocktail![9]

She also expanded on the personality of Anne Knish (who was really Ficke), depicting her as intriguing. Her only complaint was that

I have come this far
Cautiously sneezing
Along the dusty highroad of convention,
But now it leads no farther toward you.[10]

Hay had struggled along the pathway of discovery until reaching the crossroads where

Eastward, it leads through cultivated fields
of intellectual fodder,
. . .
Westward, is a lane, hedge-bordered,
Shady, and of gentle indirection, ...

In creating the persona of Elijah Hay, Seiffert very slyly pokes fun at Ficke's indecision: should he return to Harvard (where he had graduated in 1904) or stay in Iowa where his law practice was located? At the end of the poem, she glimpsed the imaginary Knish:

And there ahead, the ancient, swampy way
Modernized by a febble plank or two:
But the morass of passion lures me not!
I see a vision of two plunging feet,
Discreetly shod, yet struggling in vain—
Slime
Creeps ankle-high, knee-high, thigh-high,
Till all is swallowed save a brave silk hat
Floating alone, a symbol of the creed
I perished shedding.

Instead of describing her own conventional life, Seiffert created a tantalizing, yet mock-humorous description of one of the illusive Spectric poets.

At the same time that she was having fun with the hoax, one of her Spectric poems actually pointed the way to her best poetry of the next decade. She experimented with symbolism of a highly psychological nature, writing "The King Sends Three Cats to Guinevere."[11] What makes this poem her first important one is that she succeeded in uniting traditional mythology with the newly popularized brand of psychology. In this poem she describes three cats sent to the mythical Queen Guinevere in Camelot. All three cats are grey; each carries a gift: purple grapes, a red apple and poison toadstools. In an aside, she suggests that they really

represent three major arcana cards of the tarot deck — Bacchus, Satan and the Hangman — suggesting a psychological state of apprehension.

During 1917 Seiffert as Elijah Hay carried on an extensive correspondence with other young poets who had welcomed her own verse such as William Carlos Williams and Alfred Kreymborg. Williams disliked Knish because of her seriousness, and Seiffert's comment was "the cream of the whole thing is that Arthur, who especially scorns the whole business, is criticized as taking it too seriously! And what a wonderful argument for the feminist cause that we poor women cannot take our verses in a lighter vein!"[12]

By the spring of 1918, the hoax had become unraveled and reviewers revealed the true identities of the "Spectric" poets.[13] The results for Seiffert were beneficial. Some twenty years later she recalled that although "it was basically a joke," the impact "loosened up our styles, injected a lively sense of irony into our poetry, and did us all a lot of good; or so it seems to me."[14] It was also a very powerful introduction to the leading poets of the 1920s. William Carlos Williams became a lifelong friend and thought it was a therapeutic process to carry on the hoax for almost two years. "I have always thought that the forcing of the mind, the making it take some artificial hurdles, purely invented, got it into a mode which is the essence of poetic invention itself—pure fantasy itself which is the essence of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—or any poetic invention. Many of us never achieve such an escape from this world."[15]

In the midst of removing her pseudonym, the Spectric "Elijah Hay," Seiffert found a stable niche in the pages of *Poetry*. The influential editor, Harriet Monroe, later recalled that "her talk had a pungent flavor, and her highly trained art searched secret places of the mind."[16] This respected journal and the editor's friendship allowed Seiffert to fashion her own place for poetry and for criticism. It was in this journal that she experimented with three poems inspired by Oriental art.[17] She also wrote a short essay describing the work of Alfred Kreymborg, editor of *Others,* in writing plays for mime acting.[18]

After five years of writing poetry, and having twenty-six poems published in three poetry journals, she signed a contract with Alfred Knopf to have her first book published. *A Woman of Thirty* (1919) contains sixty-four poems and a morality play, "The Old Woman." The four-part arrangement of poems indicate the important influences on her writing. Part one consists of twenty-five love poems, many of them quite commonplace. Part two was called "Studies and Designs" and categorized twelve of her best. Part three presented thirteen shorter sonnets and nature poems as an "Interlude," reflecting the influence of Ficke. Part four contained her Spectric poems, including her most famous one, "Night." She depicted night as a chameleon-like creature which could turn into a lion, a python, and a siren. She had

. . . opened the door
And night stared at me like a fool,
Heavy dull night, clouded and safe —
I turned again toward the uncertainties
Of life withindoors.[19]

This concern with the inner life, the psychology of her own consciousness, places her in the vanguard of later feminist poetry. She is a precursor of such noted poets as Adrienne Rich and Anne Sexton.

The collection received generally favorable comments in the press, although two negative votes were cast by book reviewers. Louis Untermeyer correctly characterized her work as minor poetry, with spots of "originality blurred by moth-eaten phrases and adjectives as outworn as 'alien.'"[20] Clement Wood took a more New York-centered perspective. He found that "the dominant overtone is an attempt at a deft sophistication, which can never quite conceal that it is the sophistication of rural Illinois, rather than the sophistication of Chicago," but he failed to comment directly on the poems.[21]

In the 1920s, as her children grew up and her family responsibilities increased with her father's recurring illnesses, Marjorie Seiffert continued to write poetry. She also maintained her friendships with the other Tri-City writers who had now become dispersed. When the Socialist writer, Floyd Dell returned home in 1921, a round of parties were reported in the local newspapers. A swimming party at Credit Island and a party at Ficke's home preceded a luncheon at Seiffert's around the Fourth of July.[22] She maintained the annual practice of taking a two week vacation to New York City alone. William Carlos Williams later remembering how she "would invite all of her male friends, all for whom she cared, to join her for an evening—a supper, the theatre, or as she chose. We would go to a speakeasy, discuss our affairs and the world, rush off, as we did once, she and I, to O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms,* then at the beginning of the second act, she'd excuse herself and leave me alone to see the play out while she kept another engagement."[23]

Her friendship with Bynner and Ficke continued during this decade. She contributed poetry to and financially supported an annual prize for *The Palms*, Bynner's new interest. She and her husband also started an annual custom of vacationing near Santa Fe, New Mexico during the winter, visiting Ficke and his second wife who increasingly spent longer periods of time there because of Ficke's declining health. Often in the "contributor's notes" of a magazine, the editor would mention her earlier pseudonym of Elijah Hay. She continued the Spectric aura of playfulness in one of her poems of this period. "Theorem" described lust as polygonal; "transcendentalists rely upon mating polygon to polygon" —

Only in Geometry the lust
For mating can be strangled,
The insensate urge of matching dust
To kindred dust, forgotten.[24]

Her second major work appeared in 1927. *Ballads of the Singing Bowl* contained her best poetry and emphasized folkloric poetry. In most of her major poems, Seiffert used the simple rhythm of the ballad stanza to describe psychological states of being through fantastic symbolism. In these ballads bizarre creatures objectify psychological moods in the form of witches, mermaids, dolphins, gnomes and deserted cities. The title referred to her heart which was "an old copper bowl made to hold wine. Given away, pawned, sold, it will stay mine. Long ago it was filled, now the wine's drunk or spilled; empty, shining copper thing, when you touch it hear it ring bing, bing, bing!"[25]

Critics applauded the new collection of poetry. William Rose Benet argued that Seiffert's importance was in "her range of theme, her command of glamour, her ironic touches, and her delicate conjuring of horror."[26] Arthur Guiterman noted that her combination of lyricism and horror was "managed so musically, romantically, and with such a notable absence of cruelty that it is a pleasure for all concerned."[27]

Her ability to use aspects of glamour was demonstrated in her "Ballad of the Man-Made Woman." In 13 stanzas she traced the male manipulation and definition of female beauty.[28] In the fourth stanza, Seiffert described how men shaped a female's definition of beauty in two ways:

> The first carved dreams in her empty eyes,
> The next tuned her ears with heavenly lies.

In the sixth stanza,

> One man worked an age-long while
> To change the shadow of her smile.
> Another moulded her curving breast
> Till it offered rest, and gave no rest.

By making "her body ripe and sweet," according to male assumptions of beauty, "She grew less human, and more strange." In these subtle lines, Seiffert transcended the 1920s "flapper" concept, creating a powerful vision of the psychological feelings of male-defined beauty.

She was equally successful in creating the *frisson* of horror in descriptions of the grotesque. One example is a gnome who appears in "Ballad of Gilgeddy" as the personification of despair.[29] Gilgeddy

> Lived underground
> In darkness, in silence,
> Hearing but the sound
> Of hidden rivers running,
> Of rain-water seeping,
> And the whisper roots make
> Creep, creep, creeping.

Seiffert's subtlety in creating allusions of leaking pipes and seepage is reinforced in a later stanza where

Seeping water sought him,
Dripping water found him,
Tiny rootlets fed on him,
Strong roots bound him.

. . . .

A house for a year or two
Shuts out despair . . .
Now there is a bitter chill
Shivery up the air.

Using the metaphor of a hole in the house as a break in a relationship, Seiffert closes with the gnome's emergence.

When the breach is wide enough
In creeps Gilgeddy
Let it crumble, let it rot,
The house is doomed already!

Seiffert's third major work appeared two years later and continued the psychological emphasis of the previous collection. *The King With Three Faces and Other Poems* (1929) received critical acclaim. In particular, the title poem received attention. Ruth Lechlitner considered the poem "clean-cut and swift-moving, and a sly humor lurks beneath the sharp outlines of the conversation between the characters."[30] Percy Hutchinson considered it superior to her sonnets because its conception was profoundly bizarre.[31] Lola Ridge interpreted the male figure as basic to a "sex-duel" motif, with the king's personality consisting of an amorous man-child, a father-counselor, and a beloved enemy.[32] This was Seiffert's way of poetically creating a Freudian trinity of id, ego, and super-ego. M. D. Zabel called her "a poet who wastes few words and never squanders the resources of her richly stored mind."[33]

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Seiffert continued her local activities, and many Moline residents can remember her annual poetry reading sessions for school children.[34] With the increasing ill health of her father, her writing decreased. Her father gave his estate, "Allendale" to the Moline School System in 1931 and came increasingly under his daughter's care. Her poetry appeared in the *New Yorker* during the 1930s as her literary patron, Harriet Monroe, was relinquishing editorial control of *Poetry*.[35]

Seiffert's fourth and last collection appeared nine years later, in 1938. *The Name of Life* maintained the same high standards of her previous work. There were echoes of Ficke in her poem "Time and Tide" and another subtle exploration of feminism in "Prisoner." In the latter, a woman

. . . sat so silently that they
Did not observe her steal away,

Nor guess the journey she went on,
Nor even see that she was gone.[36]

After her journey to a "dream-valley,"

. . . all the valley flowed and broke
Like wind-blown mist, like curling smoke;
The bright familiar room took shape.
Had she no refuge, no escape?
Free and unhindered as she seemed
Was she the prisoner she dreamed?
Before her stood the open door,
Nothing beyond it any more.

She seems to be aware of her own imprisonment in a self-concept which she could not modify in mid-life. Lechlitner summarized this poem and her other psychological ballads as "symbols of what we now understand to be mental or emotional neuroses. In such a ballad the poet not only tells a story, but, like a skilled psychoanalyst, reveals from and through the pattern of a dream or illusion, the emotional experiences that direct life."[37] Her friend Eunice Tietjens argued that the resulting spirit of the poetry was "so courageous and unconquerable, so essentially youthful in fact, that the total effect of this new book . . . is thoroughly tonic."[38]

This was her last major work. Seiffert stopped writing after the death of her father on August 31, 1940.[39] Her friend Arthur Davison Ficke died in 1945. She moved permanently to San Clemente, California by the end of the decade, where she spent the rest of her life, dying in January, 1970.

Her very best lines exhibited a subtle juggling of the psychologically bizarre. She also continued her light verse, very much in the Dorothy Parker mold. A good example of this is "Personal Questions," in which "The urge to ask a personal question,/ Wrecks more lives than indigestion," and "The cross-questioning of spouses,/ Leads to life in different houses."[40] Her poetry deserves to be remembered for its treatment of psychological moods and important themes. She was not only a regional poet, but an interesting representative poet of the modern period in American literature.

NOTES

[1]William Roba, "Quad-Cities Writers: A Group Portrait," *Western Illinois Regional Studies*, 6 (Spring 1983), 71-79.

[2]*A Poet's Life: Seventy Years in a Changing World* (New York: Macmillan, 1938), 434.

[3]Davenport (Iowa) *Times*, January 11, 1910.

[4]This house is at 1628 11th Avenue, Moline.

[5]Clipping from the Davenport *Times* (? 1934), Davenport Public Library, Special Collections.

[6]Davenport *Times* clipping, undated. Monroe stated that "after maternity 'it was impossible even to get four uninterrupted — and musical composition requires at least that.'" "Marjorie Allen Seiffert," *Poetry* 26, no. 1 (April 1925), 32.

[7]Floyd Dell, *Moon-Calf* (New York: Knopf, 1921), chapter 24.

[8]"The Picnic," *Little Review*, 2 (January-February 1916), 18-19.

[9]"Spectrum," *Others*, 3 (January 1917), 10-11.

[10]Ibid. Kreymborg preferred "new experimentation with word values and rhythms and structures." Frederick J. Hoffman, *et al. The Little Magazine* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 49.

[11]*Others*, 5 (December 1918), 13.

[12]Quoted by William Jay Smith, *Spectra Hoax* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 27.

[13]William Roba, "Twins in My Cradle: Arthur Davison Ficke, Iowa Poet," *Books at Iowa*, no. 39 (November 1983).

[14]Quoted by Vincent Starrett, "Grey Cells at Play," *Coronet*, February 1, 1939, p.39.

[15]Quoted by Smith, p. 44.

[16]*Poet's Life*, p. 425.

[17]"Japanese Vase Wrought in Metals," *Poetry*, 15 (October 1919), 28-29; her earlier poems were "Print by Kiyonaga" and "A Print by Hiroshige," *Others*, 4 (December 1917), 21-22.

[18]"Kreymborg's Plays for Poem-Mimes," *Poetry*, 13 (January 1919), 224-227.

[19]*Current Opinion*, 62 (April 1917), 281.

[20]"Sweetness and Light," *Dial*, 68 (April 1920), 535.

[21]New York *Call* (March 28, 1920).

[22]Davenport *Democrat* (June 26, 1921).

[23]*The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (New York: Random, 1951), 243.

[24]*Palms*, 1 (Christmas 1923), 142.

[25]*Ballads of the Singing Bowl* (New York: Scribner's, 1927), vii.

[26]"A Contrast in Poets," *Saturday Review of Literature*, February 11, 1928, p. 592.

[27]"Poems, Opaques, Translucent and Clear," *Outlook*, 146, July 6, 1927, pp. 319-22.

[28]"Ballad of the Man-Made Woman," *Ballad of the Singing Bowl* (New York: Scribner's, 1927), 9-11.

[29]"Gilgeddy," *Ballad,* pp. 40-42.

[30]"Women Poets," New York Herald-Tribune *Books,* 12 (February 9, 1930), 21.

[31]"Six New Books of Poetry," New York Times Book *Review,* February 2, 1930, 27.

[32]"Iron Crown," *Poetry,* 36 (June 1930), 165-69.

[33]*New Republic,* October 30, 1929, p.303.

[34]Interview with Fred Swanson, October, 1978.

[35]A good example of this poetry is "Autumn Song," *The New Yorker,* October 4, 1930, p. 89. C. D. Waterman graciously allowed me to use his private collection to locate this example.

[36]*The Name of Life* (New York: Scribner's, 1938), pp. 73-76.

[37]"Lyric, Ballad and Portrait," New York Herald Tribune *Books,* October 16, 1938, p.2.

[38]"With a High Heart," *Poetry,* 53 (February 1939), 284.

[39]Appearing originally in the *New Yorker,* it was reprinted in a clipping from the Davenport *Times* (? 1934).

[40]Davenport *Times* (? 1934).

FLOYD DELL IN THE WESTERN ILLINOIS REGION[1]

Clarence A. Andrews

Floyd Dell was born in Barry, Illinois, then a Pike County town of about 1300, on Tuesday, June 28, 1887. His Pennsylvania Dutch father, Anthony Dell (called "Banty" for his short stature and pugnacious attitude), a Civil War veteran, was forty-eight. His mother, Kate Crone Dell, a former schoolteacher of Irish ancestry, was forty-one. Dell was the last of four children; he had two older brothers and a sister.

By the time he was thirty, at the time of his country's entrance into World War I, he had become (in Davenport, Iowa, Chicago, and New York's Greenwich Village) a major literary editor and critic, and a talented poet, playwright and essayist. By 1917 he had been friend, critic, literary adviser and sometime "father-confessor" to several major literary figures — Carl Sandburg, Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, Susan Glaspell, and Eugene O'Neill among them — and a colleague of many others of lesser stature. He had been at the heart of that golden age, the Chicago literary "renaissance" of 1910-1920, held in high esteem by the decade's three literary historians — Bernard Duffey, Dale Kramer, and Harry Hansen.[2]

Yet only a year later, in April, 1918, while the American Expeditionary Force was turning the tide of the War in favor of the Allies, Floyd Dell, with four others, was indicted in New York City under the Wartime Espionage Act. It was a serious matter — conviction would have sent him to prison for twenty years.[3]

We have only to look at Dell's formative years in Barry (1887-1899), in Quincy (1899-1903), and in Davenport (1903-1908) to see the sources of his later reputation and of the events leading up to his 1918 predicament. By Thursday June 28, 1908, his twenty-first birthday, Dell had arrived at the intellectual state which would shape his life and career.

Moreover, to understand the situations and events that shaped Dell's life and attitudes is to learn something new of life in small towns in America. For example, Dell was a confirmed Socialist by the time he left Quincy. Richard Lingeman's classic study, *Small Town America* (1980) doesn't discuss the subject of Socialism at all.

Barry, said Dell, was "vaguely permeated by Southern influences — a touch of laziness, quite a lot of mud, and, like the scent of honeysuckle, a whiff of the romantic attitude toward life." Nevertheless, Dell added, the

town "feels itself to be a part of that great Middle West which centers in Chicago."[4]

When Barry got its own railroad, it was only a spur line of the Norfolk and Western. But although Dell once described Barry as "a church, a saloon, a blacksmith shop and a few stores ranged on the four sides of a square,"[5] there was also Blair's Boarding-House (and sometime hotel, in one room of which Dell was born); a candy store with a library upstairs reached by an outside stairway; a pool hall; a barber shop, which also served as a polling place on election days ("Oyez, oyez, oyez, the polls are open!")[6] at which time the saloon was closed; Henderson's grocery store, in whose "back" citizens gathered to "denounce 'traitors,' and predict glorious victories for the Republican party;" an "opera house" (a small wooden theater which also served the town as a gymnasium); a butcher shop (meat was not sold in groceries as it is today); a school — a "great red brick building at the top of a hill . . . with a generous grassy and tree-strewn expanse" around it; and a bank. For a while there was also a woolen mill, where Dell's father worked as a foreman.

Anthony Dell had lost his butcher shop in the Panic of '73, and his foreman's job when the woolen mill shut down. In middle-age he was a man with no future, no longer possessing the "respectability" he had enjoyed as a business man — except on Decoration Day every May 30th, when his membership in the G. A. R. made him "respectable" for a day. "'Respectability' in Pike County," said Dell, "meant the appearance and presumption of belonging to the class of those who lived by their superior brains, preferably upon profits, interest or rent, rather than unambitiously and stupidly by manual labor. There was an elaborate code of dress and of manners which connoted 'respectability.'"[7] But in Barry there were also degrees of respectability — "a father who used to have a butcher shop was not quite on a par with a father who was cashier of a bank."[8]

Dell got his youthful politics from his father. For "Banty" Dell, the closing of the woolen mill was "a political and not an economic tragedy. Grover Cleveland was to blame for it all. He was a Democratic President and that was why he did it. Governor Altgeld was a Democrat, too — that was why he pardoned the [Chicago] Haymarket Anarchists." And the six-year-old Dell "wondered why Democrats were allowed to exist."[9]

From his ex-schoolteacher mother, Dell got other philosophies. She had dreamt that her first son, "a sensitive artist, with a love of drawing," might become a professional artist. Her second son, "so neat with his clothes," would become a gentleman. The daughter would become a "beauty."

But for the present the family was *"poor"* as young Floyd realized one Christmas when he found only a pencil and some popcorn in his stocking, and the family had only potato soup for Christmas dinner. The older boys, weary of wearing "patched clothes" to school became educational dropouts, one becoming a harnessmaker, the other a machine operator, running a saw "which presently took off a thumb." The daughter, unable to

FLOYD DELL. Courtesy of the Newberry Library.

bear her frustrated father's brutality, ran off to Chicago to become a shopgirl.

And so, says Dell, "a mother, in her forties, seeing her hopes for the older children blasted by harsh circumstances [centered] new fond hopes upon [her] golden-haired blue-eyed boy." In her own way, she detected "intelligence" in young Floyd: "quickness in understanding, quickness in learning, memory, vocabulary, these and other things . . . spelled to an Irish mother a future 'scholar' from whom wonderful things might be expected." Dell would become a lawyer, studying at Ann Arbor, "the best college to study law in." Later, he would be "a Republican President."

Before he was five and in school, Dell discovered he could read, but once in school he became a nuisance, sometimes correcting the teacher. He was no Little Lord Fauntleroy, however, no "momma's boy." He could hold his own with the school bullies.

One day he discovered a sign "Free Public Library," over the candy shop. He quickly learned that the magazines there were for reading, and that books could be taken home. He already knew about the "Diamond Dick" and "Nick Carter" novels which were displayed in a local stationery store window, although he had no nickels or dimes for them. Now the "gray-haired woman librarian" started him reading the "Elsie Dinsmore" books by Martha Finley — even though, as Russel Nye says, "what boy would be caught with [such books]?"[10] Perhaps for that reason the librarian turned Dell to *Frank on a Gunboat,* a book Nye's *The Unembarrassed Muse* ignores. Next, it was *Oliver Optic's Magazine,* edited by William Taylor Adams, the man who gave Horatio Alger his start.

Soon Dell was reading Daniel DeFoe's *Captain Jacques* and Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* — the latter a book which Dell was to read and reread. But Dell could not tolerate Dickens or Thackeray, though he tried. He "spent all the time he could at the library, preferring its peace rather than the environment of a home where there was always some painful reminder of poverty."[11]

From his mother Dell was acquiring two generalizations. This "little, bent, ailing, tireless woman . . . within her own realm [and Dell stresses this was "not just the kitchen" or the dining table] was an all-powerful Goddess . . . Her realm, for her youngest son, was the Ideal Universe . . . a world that extended in Time as well as in mere Space. [It] stretched out . . . beyond the familiar house and yard, the half-explored neighborhood, the partly-glimpsed small town, out past Pike County itself, into America, an America come to by my pioneer ancestors as a free country, a country to be proud of, with Washington and Lincoln to reverence, a flag to cherish as a soldier's son; out to a world beyond that, the older world from which Columbus came, with knights and heroes in it, Greece and Rome to remember, China and Africa to civilize and explore."[12]

His mother was also "the Lawgiver," and she taught him that there was a "Moral Universe." From her he had "the mysterious knowledge of Right

and Wrong; she gave me a Conscience to govern my most imperious impulses . . . I learned from her the sense of *ought* and *must.*"

On one of his last days in the Barry school, Dell learned a new lesson. Earlier, passing by "the great brown-painted frame building known as Blair's Boarding-House, he recalled that he had been born there. And because it was his eleventh birthday, "he wrote his name all along the side of the house in large letters with a piece of chalk."

Later that day, the school principal came into his classroom. "Did you write your name on the side of Blair's Boarding-House?" he asked. "Yes, sir," said Dell. "What did you do that for?" "I don't know," said Dell. "You don't know?" mocked the principal. "You must be very proud of your name." Then the principal, "embarrassed" by Dell's deliberate display of haughtiness, turned to the class. "That," he said, "is what is known as egotism."[13]

In 1899, when Dell had just turned twelve, the family gave up on Barry and moved to Quincy where Dell's brothers had found work. Quincy, said Dell, was "a city of thirty thousand inhabitants, undistinguished except for the fact that it was the largest town in a radius of five counties. It was the stepmother city of the surrounding region, unlovely and unloved. Ambitious boys dreamed of Chicago which blazed and roared to the northeast; but they came to [Quincy]."[14]

To Dell the move was important. "Barry [had] seemed . . . the scene of innumerable pains and humiliations . . . I was leaving behind me my childhood with all its awkwardness and ignorance."

But not entirely. Their new home, "half of a double house on the edge of a cheap residence district . . . held with difficulty the household goods collected by the Dells in thirty years . . . the accustomed articles of furniture and the pathetic trinkets accumulated by his mother . . . made the house look like all the houses the Dells had ever lived in."[15]

But Quincy had a real library, "a grey stone building on the corner of the Square, with young women behind the counter instead of an old lady." Soon, though "it was against the rules, [Dell] was allowed by these sympathetic guardians to go behind the counter direct to the shelves." The "two others in [Quincy who] enjoyed that privilege [were] a robust clergyman who rode a bicycle and wore knickerbockers and a deep-bosomed maternal-looking secretary of a woman's club."[16]

Dell, who up to now had had to look at his Real Universe from the seamy underside, had acquired his first real status; from now on he could look at the world from a higher vantage point he had achieved with his intelligence, and his efforts to educate himself outside the public schools.

In Quincy's Franklin School, where Dell spent the next four years, he undertook courses in music and manual training, in which he "felt helpless and hopeless." "The School with its small cinder yard . . . and with the radiator pipes running around the schoolrooms with a dis

concerting sense of being prison-bars" did not seem like a happy place. But then he discovered that there were patterns of sound in verse:

> Trochee trips from long to short;
> From long to long in solemn sort
> Slow Spondee stalks—strong foot! yet ill able
> Ever to keep with the Dactyl trisyllable.
> Iambics march from short to long;
> With a leap and a bound the gay Anapests throng . . .

—"Why this was the secret of poetry!" Dell thought.[17]

On his own, he read Ignatius Donnelly's *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World* (1882) and concluded the "Atlantis myth [was] a beautiful theme for imaginative reverie." The book led him to such non-juvenile writers as Schliemann, Champollon, Stephens, Catherwood, Tylor and Andrew Lang — all anthropologists or archaeologists. "Much have I traveled in those realms of gold since," Dell said, echoing another writer he had "discovered," "and many goodly states and kingdoms seen, but then I was like Cortez upon a peak in Darien."[18]

For a while he attended a Presbyterian Sunday School, but when "a well-dressed young son of a prosperous Quincy business man" referred to a group of Civil War Veterans (like Dell's father) as "blue-bellies," Dell became an atheist. Soon he discovered Peoria-born Robert Ingersoll and his "gospel of human self-reliance: to plow is to pray; to plant is to prophesy; and the harvest answers and fulfills." Dell's "Atheism for the first time [made him] really religious; a disorderly and meaningless Jehovah had been removed form the Universe, and Law put there to rule instead."[19]

Dell's next move — to Socialism — came in several steps. First there was the "nice lady canvasser" who, trying to sell Dell's mother a set of books which Dell wanted, inveigled Dell and his mother into a situation we would now call a "pyramid scheme." Dell's mother used some of the family's sacred "Rent Money" to purchase a sales kit and install the thirteen year old Dell ("Thirteen? Really? He looks like a young man of sixteen!") as a book canvasser — a job which the lady asserted would not only enable Dell to pay for the desired books but also a college education. After several desperate and mind-numbing weeks of rejections, Dell finally got the Rent Money back by making a sale to another poor family. "And that," said Dell, "was the end of my career as a businessman." What he had done was "cheating." "But that kind of cheating was all right in our civilization; that kind of cheating *was* our civilization from top to bottom."[20]

Then one of Dell's brothers brought home a Socialist paper, "The Appeal to Reason," and his father returned from a visit to Pike County, bearing a book, Gronlund's *Co-operative Commonwealth*. At the time, neither document disturbed Dell's Republicanism. When subsequently a

"Bryanite father of a schoolmate, a grimy iron-moulder" denounced Mark Hanna and Wall Street, Dell repeated "familiar Republican arguments" in response.

But a seed had been planted. Dell began reading books about Marxism at the Public Library. And he read a second book by Donnelly, *Caesar's Column* (1890) with its tale of a "violent and bloody [American] uprising against a ruthless Napoleonic dictator."[21]

"This revolutionary literature," said Dell, "provided for me an imaginative world in which considerations of respectability and manners did not count, and its heroism was conceived as being directed to the creation of a better world rather than setting wedding bells to ringing [as in a typical romance of the times]. What this Nihilist literature did for me was to put an end to any hold of respectability upon my conscience."[22]

But at the same time Dell was slipping into the role of laborer like his brothers in Quincy. "I worked during the summer vacations," he said; "in the course of four summer vacations in Quincy I was to have experience as a bundle boy for a department store, an elevator boy in the same, a solicitor of subscriptions for newspapers, a book-canvasser, and a worker in a candy factory . . . I was the sort of boy who could always get a job."[23]

At school, because his fellow students didn't know what the word "constitution" meant, Dell was able to convert a proposed athletic club into the "Franklin School Literary and Athletic Society." He also "engineered the starting of a school library." At the general graduation exercises, he was one of two Franklin students to deliver orations. Family finances had improved — he had a new suit, and a brother gave him a five-dollar gold piece.

Dell, who was later to write both play and film scripts, wrote his first two plays at Franklin. The plays, about John Brown and Benedict Arnold, "were rejections of the obligation of being a good ordinary citizen who got a job and did his duty by his family."

In the spring of 1902, Dell "heard a man make a Socialist speech to a small and indifferent crowd." Dell discovered that the man was a street-sweeper, a necessary city occupation in those days of horse-drawn vehicles. Listening, Dell realized that he himself was a Socialist, and he attended his first Socialist meeting with seven or eight others in the back of a jewelry store. He joined the group and became "one of the working class; I could accept my destiny as a working-man with a good grace for it was by this class that this whole sham civilization would be destroyed, and a new one erected all over the world."[24]

Working in the candy factory that last summer in Quincy, he met a girl fellow worker who also read Robert Ingersoll, and the two had a brief romance which ended when the plant shut down and the Dell family moved to Davenport. It was Dell's first affair, but it would not be his last one.

As the steamer *Bald Eagle* carried the Dells up the Mississippi that summer of 1903, Dell "became a poet, [creating the girl's] image in magic

words . . . If one speaks the right words in the right order, one can have power over Nature — that is Magic."[25]

Then "the steamer rounded the bend, the wind took his hat playfully and flung it into the river — the spell was broken, he and [the girl] were not in some Elysium together, but she was back [in Quincy], and he was here, making his entrance hatless into Davenport."[26]

"Davenport was one of three towns which altogether had a population of about a hundred thousand people. Across the river, with Rock Island and its Government Arsenal in between, was the city of Rock Island, and beside it, Moline with its great plow factories." One of Dell's brothers was a harness-maker at the Arsenal — it was still the day of horse-drawn cannon. Dell's other brother and his sister, now reunited with her family, had "less distinguished jobs." And, even at 64, the father had hopes.

Significantly for Dell, "Davenport had a large German population . . . and a considerable Jewish population. The town had the bravado of an old Mississippi river port, and the liberal 'cosmopolitan' atmosphere of a place that is in touch with European influences. It had its nose not too closely pressed against the grindstone of 'practical' fact. It had an intelligentsia who knew books and ideas."[27]

Even more important for the sixteen-year-old Dell "it had some live authors." One of these was a member of another Davenport group, prominent local exiles from New England in that nineteenth-century movement labeled the "expansion of New England."[28]

By 1903, writing under the masculine-sounding pseudonym of Octave Thanet, Alice French had already published nine novels or collections of short stories. But these two apparently never met — Dell said "fiction did not interest [him] much," and French's only reference to Dell was to "that young socialist poet . . . something Dell."[29] At the time of Dell's arrival, French was considering a novel about labor conditions in the Quad-Cities — its ending, with a young Quad-Cities' industrialist leading a squad of strike-breakers against a group of strikers while a little girl stood off to one side singing the Harvard "Fight Song" probably would have made Dell snicker.

Especially significant for Dell and his future were the other "live authors" — George Cram Cook (b. 1873), scion of a distinguished pioneer Davenport family, Harvard graduate and ex-English teacher at the University of Iowa; Susan Glaspell (b. 1876), Drake University graduate, destined to become a major novelist and playwright; Harry Hansen (b. 1884, son of a wagonmaker) who like the Dells, lived west of Davenport's Brady Street on the German side of the city; and Arthur Davison Ficke (b. 1883), son of a prominent Davenport lawyer, world traveler and philanthropist.

In 1903, however, Ficke was a student at Harvard, a classmate of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and of Witter Bynner, who would also become a well-known poet, and who would collaborate with Ficke on *Spectra*, a literary hoax written in Davenport and Moline in 1916.

"In 1903," said Harry Hansen, "Davenport was a river town with rare historical associations that [came to be] richly fulfilled.

> While Floyd Dell lived there and attended high school, Ficke was writing his first book of lyrics; Susan Glaspell was toiling under the midnight lamp over short stories for the *Black Cat* and attempting musical comedies; George Cram Cook was living on a farm [at Buffalo] in the Mississippi lowlands to the [west] and basking in the sunshine from [co-authoring a novel] with Charles Eugene Banks (who later became a prominent Chicago writer and editor).[30]

At first Dell liked Davenport:

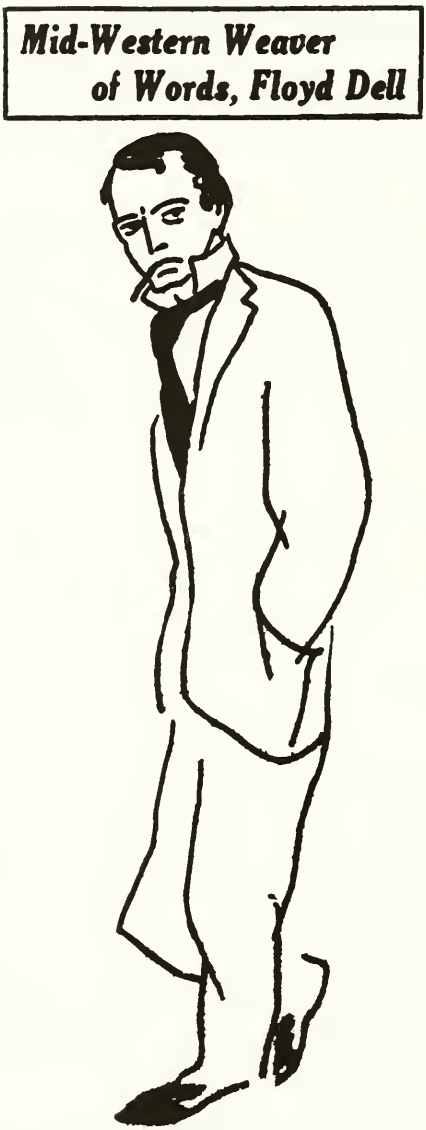
> It was different from its sister towns across the river. Rock Island was merely commonplace and uninteresting. Moline seemed like a nightmare — the inconceivably hideous product of unrestricted commercial enterprise; its center was occupied by the vast, bare, smoke-begrimed structures of the greatest plow-factory on earth; a little fringe of desultory shops, insulted and pushed aside by incessantly switching trains of freight cars, gave way to a drab and monotonous area of cheap and hastily-constructed workingmen's dwellings, each house exactly like the next, street after street and mile after mile.[31]

In 1878, Alice French, in her story "Communists and Capitalists: A Sketch From Life," had described the interior of one of these houses where a worker, discharged from the plow-works because of his Communist sympathies, lived with his wife and six children. It was a "hideous shanty" — inside "the gleaming eyes of a great rat" peered through a hole in the ceiling. The patrician Alice had little sympathy for the man, and called him "a bad boy" for his antagonism toward the middle class.[32]

In contrast to the workers' dwellings, "afar, set almost inaccessibly upon the hills like the castles of robber barons, [were] the houses of Moline's leisure class." One of these homes, the residence of a former president of John Deere and Company, has since been given to Moline as a center for various community activities. Another, the home of the manufacturer of Velie automobiles, has since been converted into a restaurant and night-club.

Unlike either Rock Island or Moline, said Dell, "Davenport had a kindlier aspect. Its long tree-shaded streets, its great parks, its public buildings, even its shops and homes, seemed to have a kind of serenity and dignity as though it were understood that in this town life was meant to be enjoyed."[33]

In his five years in Davenport, Dell set the pattern for his future. He became a voluminous reader of poetry, and began writing poetry seriously with a facility that amazed the townspeople. (His first published poem, "Memorial Day," appeared in a local newspaper in 1904. Soon others were appearing in national magazines.) Marilla Freeman, a Davenport librarian, discovered his talent through a Central High School English teacher, and she began telling others about this strange boy. One of these was George



Drawn by Gropper, in The Bookman.

Sketch of Dell, from the Philadelphia Public Ledger, December 15, 1923. Courtesy of the Newberry Library.

Cram Cook who was raising vegetables to support himself ("a Harvard graduate raising vegetables?" townspeople asked with raised eyebrows). Once when he was in the library, Freeman — Dell's "beautiful and adored 'librarian-goddess'" — showed him some of Dell's poems.

"A sixteen-year-old boy wrote these? Here in Davenport?" Cook asked.

"Even so," said Freeman.

"Then how," demanded Cook, "do you explain the fact that you have this morning neglected to run the flag up over the public library of this city?"[34]

Dell's efforts also led to a meeting with the "elderly and sweet poet-journalist, Charles Eugene Banks — tall, Windsor-tied, with hair that dripped over his eyes." In Banks, Dell "found a critical intelligence which [he] could respect, and, with his permission exploited it ruthlessly; [Banks] taught [Dell] patiently how to edit [his] own work, and how to revise it."[35]

"Davenport seemed determined to be kind to me," said Dell. "[T]he attitude of my new friends . . . was unmistakable." Unknown to him, some Davenport people were planning to help Dell get a college education. But when, in the presence of a would be benefactor, Dell, "from [his] Socialist ramparts, blasted college education with a withering fire of criticism," and "point[ed] out that the actualities of life were the only school in which one could learn to write," the opportunity was lost.[36]

Dell had discovered that "night and solitude were best" when he felt a "poem coming on:"

> Late at night I [would walk] across the bridge that crossed from Davenport to the Arsenal. Policemen would pass at intervals, swinging their clubs, pairs of late lovers would emerge slowly from the darkness into the glare of an arc-light . . . Where the bridge came to an end, a stone walk began that skirted the Island toward Moline, where at intervals the darkness was suddenly burst open by the crimson glare of a blasting furnace.[37]

As he had in Quincy, Dell discovered a Socialist group which met in the German Turner Hall near Harry Hansen's home on Friday evenings. Dell dropped out of high school and again found a job in a candy factory. After work, on Friday evenings he would hurry to the Socialist meetings which, as in Quincy, attracted only a few people. Among them was Fred "Fritz" Feuchter, "a mail-carrier, a big, florid, dynamic man, large-minded and eloquent and wiser in great things and small than anyone [Dell] had ever known." His resulting friendship with Feuchter, said Dell, "was the most important thing that had happened in [his] life."[38]

Hansen later wrote that "[Dell's] Socialist activity was largely due to a lad's hunger for new intellectual contacts, a reaching out for new friendships to replace the inadequacy of association with mere schoolboys."[39]

But Hansen misjudged Dell. When Dell lost his job at the candy factory, he took over the editorship of the *Tri-City Workers Magazine.* Under the pen name of Thersites, he published such muckraking paragraphs as this

one which offered a view of Davenport night life his "poetic prowlings" had not shown him:

> One of the strangest parts of Davenport, of which I had a sufficient view from the outside, was the 'red-light district' — some streets down by the river, with houses of prostitution, in which plump women in flaming kimonos could be seen at the open windows, out of which came the sounds of laughter and piano-music, and into the doors of which well-dressed young men, talking gaily, entered.[40]

Marcia Noe substantiates Dell's statements: "This 'Bucktown' area became so notorious as to provoke Bishop Henry Cosgrove's remark that Davenport was 'the wickedest city for its size in America,'[41] and prompt the trustees of Iowa College to seek a new site that was less threatening to the moral and intellectual development of their students."[42]

Soon Dell met Harry Hansen, then a Davenport newspaper reporter. "We young and aspiring writers spoke with admiration of Susan Glaspell, who had won the huge prize of $500 for a short story," said Hansen. [Then] one day Dell told me that [a publisher] had bought a poem of his . . . I glowed by reflected light."[43] Hansen and Dell found a common interest in plays and poetry, and soon they began meeting in Davenport's Central Park to walk and talk.[44]

Dell found a job as a cub reporter for a Davenport newspaper but lost the job after insulting the editor. Then, having become acquainted with George Cook and Susan Glaspell (who had become lovers even though Cook was married to another), Dell moved out to the log-cabin farmhouse at Buffalo to help Cook with his gardening. Said Glaspell, "In the whole history of Iowa there has probably not been so stimulating a hired man; and perhaps since the beginnings of growth seeds have not matured in so lively a stream of intellectual life. Spraying the apple trees with arguments about Haeckel and Nietsche and Marx, weeding potatoes and theories, plowing the earth to its greatest poems!"[45]

In Davenport, Dell, still technically a minor, and with only eleven years of formal schooling, had lifted himself out of the working class into the intellectual class. At twenty-one, he left Davenport behind for new Dariens:

> He had been happy in [Davenport]; it had given him love and painful wisdom, and the joy of struggle. . . .The town had been built for him, though they who built it had not known. It had been built for young men and girls to be happy in, to adventure in, and to think strange and free and perilous thoughts.[46]

His next stop was Chicago: "Chicago! Chicago!," he wrote. The city was a cynosure, drawing young dreamers from all over the Midwest, as a flame draws moths.

Dell's Davenport reputation as a poet and writer of human interest stories had preceded him, and so he was offered a reporter's job on *The*

Chicago Evening Post. Soon the *Post's* brilliant literary editor, Francis Hackett, discovered Dell's talents and critical abilities; he asked Dell to be the assistant editor. Hackett had replaced Henry Blackman Sell, whose book reviews puffed local book-seller's merchandise in order to sell advertising. But Hackett had no mind for such toadery. His attitudes were like those Cook had expressed to Dell: "the conservative tradition [was] a discouragingly solid edifice . . . Respectabili ty still stood with shotted guns behind the literary barricades. . . .But . . . the time was soon coming when the literary sansculottes would swarm over the barricades."[47]

"Criticism was indeed dreary in those days," said Susan Glaspell. "But even in a livelier critical period Hackett would have become recognized as a leading book critic."[48] Dell and Hackett quickly revolutionized book reviewing in America; in the *Review's* weekly pages, it became exciting, not pedantic. Moreover, the reviews sold books; readers trusted the *Post's* judgements.

Soon Dell himself became the *Post's* literary editor. Cook and Glaspell had followed Dell to Chicago (Harry Hansen and Arthur Davison Ficke came a bit later), and Dell took Cook on as his assistant.

Dell's socialism wavered slightly in Chicago. On November 11, 1908, he attended the memorial for the Haymarket anarchists at Chicago's West Side Waltheim Cemetery. As a boy with republican sympathies he had hated these anarchists — but on this occasion he found it difficult to have much feeling for or against them. Later he attended a Socialist meeting and was bored with the trivia.

The writers (and artists) in Chicago at that time belonged to one of three social groups. The older more conservative group held out at the Little Room on "Boul Mich." The newspaper gang got together at Schlogl's Restaurant. The rest, of Bohemian temperament, took up quarters in some shop buildings left over from the Columbian Exposition of 1893. The Davenport writers were among them — except for Hansen. Despite differences in philosophies, these groups made the Chicago decade from 1910 to 1920 one of the great periods of American literary production.

But Dell was not long for Chicago. His editor became angry over a misreading of a review of Dell's, and so Dell moved on to New York's Greenwich Village. There the Bohemianism which had begun in Davenport and matured in Chicago, and his longtime Socialism, came to the forefront. Dell found the Village even more congenial than either of his former homes.

In the Village, Dell fell in with Max Eastman, John Reed and others of like mind, and the group began publishing *The Masses,* a socialist newspaper which attacked World War I as "a capitalist war."[49] When America entered the war, Dell wrote on his draft card that he was "a conscientious objector against this war."[50] To the editors the war was madness; they wrote of the day when "the workers would learn their lesson, take up the sword of revolution, and achieve peace, security and justice."[51]

For its polemicizing, *The Masses* was "harassed by the post-office authorities," and then, in October, 1918, "suppressed by the Government."[52] Dell and the others were indicted under the "so-called Espionage Act, which was being used not against German spies but against American Socialists, Pacifists, and anti-war radicals."[53] So at ten-thirty in the morning of April 15, Dell and four others stood in New York's "old Post Office Building" and heard the charge: "conspiring to promote insubordination and mutiny in the military and naval forces of the United States, and to obstruct recruiting and enlistment to the injury of the service."[54] "Ranged against us," said Dell, "were the newspapers with their screaming headlines of Allied defeat and the militant tunes of a Liberty Bond band in the park beneath the windows."[55]

The first half of the charge was dismissed before the trial began and one defendant, "a girl poet," was released. During the trial, one of Dell's editorials, of which he was quite proud, was read: "There are some laws that the individual feels he cannot obey, and he will suffer any punishment, even that of death, rather than recognize them as having authority over him."[56]

The trial lasted two weeks; the jury was unable to decide on the guilt or innocence of the defendants and they were set free. But a few days later, the military, ignoring Dell's statement on his draft card, drafted him. A week later he was discharged.

From 1918 to 1935 Dell published a score of books — essays, short stories, novels and autobiographies. In 1929, Dell's socialism was cooled by the rising tide of communism in Russia, and that led to a break with his old socialist comrades. In an essay in *The Liberator,* successor to *The Masses,* he accused his former associates of an unwillingness to look at the world through anything but a jaundiced view. Mike Gold, the editor, in turn "flagellated" Dell, accusing him of having joined the "dress suit crowd."[57]

Dell's conversion even led him to accept a position with the Government's WPA Writing Program in the 1930s. His writing career effectively ended in the mid-1930s, even though he was to live another third of a century.[58]

NOTES

[1]Sources include: Susan Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple* (New York: Stokes, 1927); Floyd Dell, *Moon-Calf* (New York: Knopf, 1920); *Homecoming: An Autobiography* (New York: Farrar, 1933); *Looking at Life* (New York: Knopf, 1924); John E. Hart, *Floyd Dell* (New York: Twayne, 1971); G. Thomas Tanselle, "Faun at the Barricades: The Life and Work of Floyd Dell" (Diss., Northwestern U., 1959); Marcia Noe, "A Critical Biography of Susan Glaspell" (Diss., Univ. of Iowa, 1976). Noe's

essay "'A Romantic and Miraculous City' Shapes Three Midwestern Writers," *WIRS* (Fall, 1978) provides a different context for Dell in Davenport.

[2]Bernard Duffey, *The Chicago Renaissance in American Letters: A Critical History* (East Lansing, Michigan State Univ., 1953); Dale Kramer, *Chicago Renaissance: The Literary Life in the Midwest, 1900-1930* (New York, Viking, 1955) and Harry Hansen, *Midwest Portraits* (New York, Harcourt, 1923) all cite Dell as a major figure in Chicago and American literature.

[3]Floyd Dell, "Not Without Dust and Heat," *Looking at Life*, p. 154; *Homecoming*, p. 313.

[4]*Homecoming*, p. 3. See also *Moon-Calf*, p. 3.

[5]*Moon-Calf*, pp. 5, 16, *seq.*

[6]*Moon-Calf*, p. 19.

[7]*Homecoming*, p. 4.

[8]*Homecoming*, p. 8.

[9]*Homecoming*, p. 9.

[10]*The Unembarrassed Muse* (New York: Dial, 1970), p. 78.

[11]*Homecoming*, p. 17; *Moon-Calf*, pp. 42-45.

[12]*Homecoming*, pp. 23-24.

[13]*Homecoming*, pp. 30-31; *Moon-Calf*, pp. 60-61.

[14]*Moon-Calf*, p. 95. Quincy is "Vickley" in *Moon-Calf*.

[15]*Homecoming*, pp. 42-43; *Moon-Calf*, pp. 96-97.

[16]*Homecoming*, p. 43. Quincy's library is not mentioned in *Moon-Calf*.

[17]*Homecoming*, p.43.

[18]*Homecoming*, p. 44. In *Moon-Calf*, Dell relates a debate he had with a school teacher on the subject of Atlantis.

[19]*Homecoming*, pp. 51-52. *Moon-Calf*, p. 115.

[20]*Homecoming*, pp. 46-50.

[21]*Homecoming*, p. 57.

[22]*Homecoming*, p. 57.

[23]*Homecoming*, p. 60.

[24]*Homecoming*, p. 73.

[25]*Homecoming*, p. 79.

[26]*Homecoming*, p. 80.

[27]*Homecoming*, pp. 80-81.

[28]Lois K. Mathews, *The Expansion of New England* (Boston, 1909). Stewart Holbrook called it *The Yankee Exodus* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1969). It has also been called "the depopulation of New England."

[29]George McMichael, *Journey to Obscurity: The Life of Octave Thanet* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1965), p.181.

[30]Hansen, *Midwest Portraits* (1923), p. 209. See also Hansen's "River Town" in the *Palimpsest* (April, 1956), for amore detailed report of Hansen's relationships with Dell, *et. al.*

[31]*Homecoming*, p. 83; *Moon-Calf*, p. 157.

[32]Octave Thanet, "A Communist's Wife," *Knitters in the Sun* (1887), pp. 173 ff; McMichael, *Journey to Obscurity*, pp. 59-61.

[33]*Homecoming*, p. 83. *Moon-Calf*, p. 157.

[34]Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple*, pp. 180-81.

[35]*Homecoming*, p. 92.

[36]*Homecoming*, pp. 93-94.

[37]*Homecoming*, p. 82.

[38]*Homecoming*, pp. 118-19. See also *Moon-Calf*, pp. 212 ff.

[39]Hansen, *Midwest Portraits*, pp. 208 ff.

[40]*Homecoming*, p. 95.

[41]Noe, "A Critical Biography of Susan Glaspell," p. 35.

[42]Noe, p. 35.

[43]Hansen, "A Davenport Boyhood," *Palimpsest*, 37, (April, 1956), p. 215.

[44]Clarence Andrews, *A Literary History of Iowa* (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1972), p. 168.

[45]Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple*, p. 181. For a discussion of Dell's influence which led Cook to become a Socialist, see Gerhard P. Bach, "A Greek Born Out of His Time," *In Recognition There You Are: Studies in Honor of John E. Hart* (Albion, MI: Albion College, 1982), pp. 21-23. I have deliberately overlooked this "conversion" (as Bach sees it), as well as the formation of the Davenport Monist Society. See Glaspell, "The Monist Society," *The Road to the Temple* pp. 188-99, and Noe's thesis, fn. 41 above.

[48]*Moon-Calf*, p. 394. In *Moon-Calf* Davenport is called "Port Royal."

[47]*Homecoming*, pp. 190-91.

[48]Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple*, p. 212.

[49]*Homecoming*, p. 293.

[50]*Homecoming*, p. 293.

[51]*Homecoming*.

[52]*Homecoming*, p. 298.

[53]*Homecoming*, p. 298.

[54]*Homecoming*, p. 313.

[55]*Homecoming*, p. 314.

[56]*Homecoming*, p. 315.

[57]Floyd Dell obituary, *New York Times*, 30 July 1969, p. 39, col. 1.

[58]Gerald Nemanic, in *A Bibliographic Guide to Midwestern Literature* (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1981), lists all of Dell's books on page 184 and lists works about Dell on pages 184-85.

THE POETRY OF JOHN KNOEPFLE

Norman D. Hinton

John Knoepfle is a regional writer as the Mississippi is a regional river. The river owes its existence and its special character to the lands around it and is undeniably a Midwest river. But the river also informs and invests a Midwest of the mind: the Mississippi helps give meaning to its region and has mythic meanings which go far beyond the physical region in which it lives.

John Knoepfle's territory is just about the same as that drained by the Mississippi and its tributaries. With very few exceptions, he writes of the land between the mountain ranges. Like the fabulous road hog, he takes his half of the country out of the middle. But Knoepfle's concerns, solutions, pains and pleasures are ours without regard to region. His Midwest of the mind is a territory large enough for any poet or any reader.

The river comparison arises naturally from Knoepfle's writing: Midwest rivers and the lands drained by them have played a major role in his writing from the beginning, and continue to do so in his latest and best book, *Poems from the Sangamon* (University of Illinois Press, 1985). Publication of this book, and of his *Selected Poems* (University of Missouri at Kansas City, 1985), gives us a chance to look at Knoepfle's achievement, which is sizeable, and to assess his current work.

Rivers into Islands (1965),[1] Knoepfle's first major book, uses its title as its major metaphor in its best poem, "church of rose of lima, cincinnati:"

> she may be undiscoverable, like silt
> slow rivers encourage into islands.

The slow accretion of thoughts into words, words into poems, poems into our consciousness may not be totally undiscoverable, but after all the centuries of criticism they are easier felt than written of. It is difficult to avoid the suspicion that this poem may be about poetry as well as about St. Rose:

> it floods out whenever the city rises
> and has a smell of common water
> at the altars, and pilots of tows
> on long hauls from pennsylvania

JOHN KNOEPFLE

needle the dark with searching lights
to catch the hour off her clock.
. . . . . .
in lima she has golden altars; germans
made them wood on the unliturgical river.

Knoepfle's poetry has never avoided the drainage ditches, whether real or mental, and this is to our advantage as we will see. He gives us glimpses of reality and concretizes our thoughts and fears in his long slim searching poems. And while there was once an Elizabethan or Romantic or even Victorian Lima of golden altars in our poetic past, honest wood is what our century's poets have most often felt compelled to use: bark, boles, knots and all.

Other qualities of Knoepfle's work can first be found in *Rivers into Islands*. "Lines for my grandfather" shows us the first of Knoepfle's Midwesterners who share real, contemporary existence with both myth and reality of the land's past:

I carried his ashes
on a monday morning,
my grandfather
who could outshoot
buffalo bill.

Sometimes Knoepfle's people can be found alone, existing in some communion with both their urban surroundings and nature:

. . . I remember
only a man on a concrete bench
who is looking at the cinnamon river,
a brushstroke of the sunset
fading in the corners of his eyes.
("april return to cincinnati")

but he cries, he cries
face the sun
with the blind man.
eagles glitter in my sight.
("encounter on delmar boulevard")

The occurrences are momentary and fade, but they can be repeated: and shall we take the man on the bench as an alienated loser, or as someone doing the best he can for himself by temporary alignment with the "cinnamon river"? Both states of mind exist in Knoepfle as they do in us, whether the figures sit on benches along the Ohio, or lean against the brick walls of loan companies in the inner heart of a river city, or look out over a bare winter landscape from a small town rather like Auburn, Illinois. Some kind of accommodation between midwest Man and the Midwest, or the comic or tragic lack of accommodation, has always been among Knoepfle's themes, along with a past which informs the present which

informs the past. Though *Rivers into Islands* was Knoepfle's first major publication, it is mature and finished, not the poet's equivalent of a "first novel." Not only are some his favorite themes and topics on hand, but the poet's voice is well developed; it will continue to grow and develop, but it will remain the same speaker's voice. This is not to say that Knoepfle's poetics have undergone no changes. The *I* of *Rivers into Islands* is not always Everyman, but often seems to be The Poet:

> . . . I consider
> a darkness that is drifting
> pale cherry blossoms on a small wind
> over the hood of the chevrolet.
> ("april return to cincinnati")
> I do not want to stay
> within this circle,
> or know my hunger in this poem.
> ("buffalo skulls")
> . . . I
> can hear the murmur of their chatter
> magnified down classroom brick
> from where I crouch
> within my cage of glass.
> ("october scrimmage")

But even poems in which the poet is consciously present and speaking can display a universe perhaps not baffled, but puzzling its own mode of existence:

> my wife sleeps
> a continent away.
> under the covers
> my skin defines the strange
> form of a man.
> ("edwardsville before sunrise")

And the deadpan comment on what someone has just said, showing us that it defines what that person is, so valuable in later work, can be seen here (the poem, "missouri hermit," also shows us the Knoepfle man who is real and myth at once):

> he cured sassafras
> and fingered the coins it sold for.
> "penny bread is good time drops."
> he liked to say that.

Finally, *Rivers into Islands* introduces us to the wild strain in Knoepfle's work, from a place whose former wildness is still just below the surface in land and inhabitants alike:

> oh, god, we booted that pumpkin
> through natchez-under-the-hill

until the
blue clay cracked
and his withered head
leered at us.
then we flung him
down a chuckhole full of blowflies
where hogs wallowed in the heat.
("harpe's head")

This strain picks up its comic tones without losing the tragic intensity in *An Affair of Culture* (1969). Though it is represented in *Selected Poems* by only two works, "tunnel blaster on bear and brotherhood" gives us one of Knoepfle's zaniest creations, a man who revenged the family honor on a bear:

. . . he thought hed hunt bear with his brother
but the bear ate his brother
before he shot the bear
he came back in here on the monday
with a bearmeat sandwich
wanted me to eat a half of it
. . . . . .
ever hear of anything
ugly as that
and he throws the grizzlies marshmallows
Ive seen him sundays do it in the zoo

The voice here is an addition to the single voice of *Rivers into Islands,* and it speaks the American vernacular with its hesitations and self-interruptions (Ive seen him sundays do it") finely tuned to the rhythms of the poem. This integration of the voice speaking (presumably) prose as part of the poem, as it becomes surer and more constant, lets the poems accomplish Yeats' desire to be able to go into the marketplace, say his poems, and have the bystanders be unaware that it is poetry they are hearing. Yeats did not add, because it would have been superfluous for him to do so, that the poems would nevertheless remain poems and show it upon inspection. When forced to choose, Yeats chose the poem over speech, but Knoepfle usually manages both:

established
at the cocktail party
I am eating
a maraschino cherry

the skull on my shoulders
is also eating
a maraschino cherry
("affair of culture")

The control of rhythms and syntax is as sure and firm as the control of the ironic voice.

An Affair of Culture was a small pamphlet; *The Intricate Land* (1970) is a major work. In some ways it is in Knoepfle's canon what *Responsibilities* was to Yeats: the poems' raw materials include the public crises of the nation, though still, as ever, rooted in the present and past Midwest:

> you lose faith today
> and tomorrow
> a little and by a little
> ("old civil rights poem")[2]

> black hawk sauk warrior
> hardnosed type he fought
> osage cherokee he fought
> the united states badly
> lost badly was ball and chained

> they took him to washington
> gave him the grand tour
> . . . . . .
> he saw jim crow rice jump jim crow
> felt wave on wave baroque
> applause saw tears pour down
> faces of the audience
> sat bemused said why
> ("black hawk questions the masses")

And the Indians, a constant subject, remind us of the ongoing Viet Nam war:

> if you will give us guns and ammunition
> and pork and flour and feed
> and take care of our wives and children
> we will fight you

> nevertheless
> we will try to fight you
> if you want us to
> as it is . . .
> ("winnebago chief to the u. s. dragoons/greenbay 1836")

But not only the Indians tell us about ourselves:

> the old man
> . . . . .
> lively and eighty
> says we don't think
> like they did
> the republic
> meant something
> different to them . . .
> ("flight to springfield missouri")

But the major piece on national affairs is "washington nocturne," in

which a president and a shoeshine boy alternately discuss playing checkers, suicide, imperial power, electoral votes, and the weariness of the presidency. They note the magnificent refusal of the American voter to shut up simply because a leader has been elected and the publicly smarmy voice the electorate learns from its local upper classes. It is in this poem, Knoepfle's longest to this point, that the land's intricacies display themselves to the fullest.

At first the President sounds a bit like a character from *Pogo,* a President on a verandah in some small town square:

> my kings are invincible
> but nobody wants to play checkers anymore
> shoeshine boy dont turn the heat down
> it may be some drummer
> will stop at the white house tonight . . .

But this nostalgic America is replaced by contemporary menace as the President leaves the room:

> . . . he rises and goes to the light cord
> and pulls the fierce darkness down
> the board is left empty in shadows
> not even the moon would look in that place
> all that power and the board empty
> nothing breathing in the spooky room . . .

No one else was able to make such a point of Lyndon Johnson's frugal ways with light bulbs. What was material for simple satire or sarcasm in other writers becomes part of the horror of the scene in Knoepfle.

The Yeatsian syntax ("all that power," "fierce darkness") and the eerie scene are soon disturbed as America enters the room:

> shoeshine boy making his rounds
> comes to the kitchen in the morning dark
> well he says isnt that just like him
> hes put the checkers away
> and hes left the board out
> I wonder who will have at the board next . . .

The checker board has become 'The Button," the Hot Line, the Presidency itself, the deadly game being played across the Pacific. Shoeshine Boy, who seems to be an adaptation of the old TV series Wonder Dog[3], speaks in the strange mode we have adopted for super-heroes of comic strips and Saturday morning TV cartoons,

> isnt that a good word dassnt
> . . . . . .
> I think its a better word than daunting
> that frost used in home burial
> but thats just my one opinion
> (shoeshine boy always talked

as if the kiwanis club were listening
sitting around nodding or shaking their heads
he was so well adjusted)

and seems occasionally to have been reading A. E. Housman,

whoever moves those checkers can destroy the world
but whats that so can you and so can I
you just take a couple of pills
or stab your veins with a penknife
thats how you can destroy the world[4] . . .

Shoeshine Boy has also referred to Robert Frost and William Henry Harrison. This prompts a very Nixon-like reaction to the electorate by the President:

well he thinks at least when Im out of office
I wont have to put up with him anymore
you get elected by an overwhelming vote
and you have to spend the next four years
listening to a cracker talk about dassnt and daunting
and my god william henry harrison . . .

The President goes off to bed and the narrator ends for us:

lafayette park is green in sunshine
and here I am
dont stare at me
with your eyes bulging eggs
. . . . . .
youre so serious
you dont like my jokes
the presidents office is ten stories high
and my wallet is sticky with blood . . .

This poem is Knoepfle's one venture into satire, and he shows a natural flair for it; like most good satires, it cuts both ways and disturbs both sides. Shoeshine Boy represents the real, and the Oval Office a myth. Shoeshine Boy is too "well adjusted" for our tastes, and the President seems a kindly and put upon old man who just wants a good checker game with a travelling salesman. But the game is deadly and the room is filled with power, and Shoeshine Boy knows that when this President is gone, an earth must remain for the next one. The "real" America is myth and TV substance, the President is a dream of a Golden Age America but has his hands on the triggers of disaster. We may find Shoeshine Boy a bit fatuous and self-conscious, but is it a President's business to find him so? Like all good poems, "washington nocturne" gives us more than we asked for. When Knoepfle performed this poem at readings in the Viet Nam days, audiences were pleased but vaguely disturbed by it. From this vantage point, that does not look to be an altogether wrong state of mind for America during the late 60's.

Knoepfle continued many of his other interests through *The Intricate Land.* He watches riders in a Kansas City bus station, the whites with children "weak in the chest asthmatic," the blacks "looking/ healthy/sickness hiding" and asks "well neighbors/enemies/how about some advice" ("bus station"). He continues to follow Daniel Boone (there were Boone poems in preceding books). And he gives us a series of poems about the Missouri Ozarks (he was still living in St. Louis at this time). The sequence, titled "from a missouri land grant," captures the Missouri land as well or better than any other writer has:

> blue coin of earth generous in that
> green hickory light shafting
> through elm and the smell of cedars
> clinging and faint in a
> rocky soil
> under old mountains
> hills worn down with forgotten seas . . .
> ("ozark spring")
> east fork
> through the ridged porphyry
> cutting the igneous stone
> purpled and polished on the spurs
> of the side trail
> . . . . . .
> we picnic in a grove
> shady with cedar
> the ground in park grass
> and flinty at the gullies
> I find a knife
> bue chert chipped
> . . . . . .
> and then a cruder point
> old and shaped lanceolate
> from seven thousand years
> a hunters work who knew
> the midcontinent in gales of dust
> . . . . . .
> he must have loved
> this place
> ("shut ins")[5]
> lower ranges
> stones heavy
> at the edge of the valley
> grinders for rending
> time into powder
> . . . . . .
> nothing moves
> seems to have ever moved
> . . . . . .

and the heart forgets the rhythm
of its own beating
and the body
comes to its own coil in the rock
for awhile
and then you go back
. . . . . .
and the vision dies in a
gleam of chrome and cars
and time has you again
but not quite again . . .
("elephant rocks")[6]

A new method has emerged. In these poems, we no longer see people regarding nature; people and nature are now one, part of the intricacy of the land, and past and present are also one. The poems are remarkable because it is as if the land itself has gone to the page and become the poem. The effect is similar to that of the "found poems" of the 60's, but what is found is not graffiti or accidentally poignant phrases, but Midwest land which *is* the poem, and us, our ancestors, and our forerunners as part of land and poem alike.

Knoepfle is a Catholic; but he is certainly not a "Catholic poet." Rather, he is a Catholic poet, and a catholic Poet. *The Intricate Land* has one of his finest religious poems, "funeral of christ," in which the funeral becomes a media event ("acolytes with portable bullhorns/harry the stragglers. . ."; "members of the press work like lean dogs/vying for camera positions"), but strangely retains its majesty and becomes the least likely of elegies.

farewell sweet flesh of christ farewell now
we do not know in our houses now
who died or who will come and walk earth.

Poems about marriage have been in the Knoepfle canon since the lines quoted above in which "my wife sleeps/a continent away," though of course in the same bed. The distance is that between two people, or between wakers and sleepers. In "for a marriage," lovers move "in places that are known/to be dangerous," but we (presumably already married) "look up from our own/evening fires/. . . and we grow peaceful/wondering." To be able to say this, one must take the sacrament seriously, and Knoepfle does believe firmly in meaningful ritual.

Nor is the book devoid of the wild and crazy streak, as in the story of the farmer who tried to kill an owl by dowsing it with kerosene and setting it afire, and succeeded in burning down his barn. The tale is cautionary, and in its temporal context redolent of napalm and of over-reaction (though it dates from well before *Intricate Land),* but it also makes wild dark comedy out of its unlikely subject. As the burning owl flies into the barn, it says

o god of all owls
stiffen my bones with manganese
. . . . . .
here I go and haylofts to the last of me
. . . . . .
farmer watched his barn burn down
birdshit he said birdshit
dirty pious birdshit birdshit

There is perhaps no clearer example of the unexpected epithet than that "pious," and the poem is a fine example of Knoepfle's feel for the combination of laughter and tragedy in the folk speech of the inhabitants of his land.

The Intricate Land was paired by an editor with a set of drawings which were unrelated and entirely inappropriate to the poetry. Perhaps as a result of this, the book did not receive the attention it deserved, and it is gratifying to find most of it is *Selected Poems*. Knoepfle followed it with a charming book of poems for children, *Dogs and Cats and Things Like That* (1972), none of which are included in his select volume, and then published *Whetstone* (1972). Although only two of the poems from *Whetstone* survive in *Selected Poems,* each is important. "Knowledge that leans against the brick walls of loan companies" is a descent into depression: the Viet Nam war continued, the split between protestor and supporter widened, and Nixon could no longer be seen as an Old-Time President. The voice in "knowledge" seems to be coming over a bullhorn, or perhaps to be crying out in Rama.

now it is possible
to break ranks
go die in a ditch or make it
anyway you can
it is no age for extremes
just huddling together
over messes of pottage
everyone who survives
will be made useful . . .

This is the nadir of feelings in Knoepfle, and it is worth noting that there are no rivers or natural landscapes except the ditch. It would be three years before this side of the poetry was integrated with the rest.

The other poem from *Whetstone* is of an entirely different nature and paradoxically shows Knoepfle at his most lyric:

we let them go
these blossoms
of the wild plum
and yet we would hold them
as keepsakes for all time

caves in the jackhammered
limestone exaltations
of darkness dovecotes
where the light beams

upriver tows
passing through the locks
it is evening
we are spellbound . . .
("so lost in space")

Most modern poets have felt the need to shore fragments against their ruins: while some of these are ephemeral, like the wild plum blossoms, even these will recur. Limestone caves are as eternal as subterranean water flow, and upriver tows, while temporary, are not likely to pass away in our time. The poem gives us the balance needed to admit any truth to the other *Whetstone* poem. It also shows some of Knoepfle's techniques at their clearest. The short line, each holding a rhythmic phrase, is not uncommon to modern American poets, nor is the continued syntax. But Knoepfle's combination of the two is as much part of his voice as his diction or his themes.

caves in the jackhammered limestone
exaltations of darkness
dovecotes where the light beams

would say the same words, but would not be poetry, or certainly not Knoepfle's singing line. The intermingling of these split utterances with the lines which follow the natural intonation curves of American English have become so much a part of the Knoepfle line, as in stanza one, that they give a variance to the language that seems as natural as any Elizabethan trick with zeugma or chiasma. At this point in his career, the technique seems as easy as breathing, but it calls for a fine ear and hours of work. Though *Whetstone* occupies a small part in *Selected Poems,* it shows us the poet at his mid-career best.

Thinking of Offerings (1975) is bleak and sparse, and the poems are untitled, as if naming them would itself be too affirmative.

the informer
cannot find his name

the hireling
has run away

now the world
is flat

the days
balance on a beam

the nights fall
as smooth as glass

the dead
gather sticks
for their fires

This dark night of the soul continues in *Winter Poems* (1975) which sustains the absorption with current events (". . . sleek bombers/villages blown to confetti"). It is good to know these poems, for we need to avoid forgetting this side of our nature, and a poet can recall it better than anyone. But the pessimism goes far beyond current politics:

it is no night for logarithms
men getting lost madness and no
hayrick to crawl on some wild
thing howling out there something that
breaks jars or bottles vacant
desire hunching at a rest stop . . .

Is the thing out there human or animal, or the deep winter night? Is it us, or something other? The poem does not say. But in the midst of despair there are other tones, some connected to marriage:

I smoothed the blankets peggy
wandering her dream she was smiling

I walk from home wrapped in myself
my strength a steel hammer of fear
last night in my sleep the bear
lunged for my death again
and I killed him with six sharp blows . . .

To be able to make one's fear a strength is an accomplishment, and it is worth noting that the narrator's goal in his walk from home is the Mississippi River and that the poem begins with a quick remembrance of John the Baptist on his feast day and the start of a late winter thaw. Later in the book the poet says, "I wish everyone could be rewritten," but these lines are signs that the rewriting is taking place, especially as the winter ends and the rivers start to flow again ("the days seem longer there is/ some breath in the cold sun").

The time of year was followed by times of day in *Poems for the Hours* (1979), and the move towards acceptance continues:

the very walls
of our houses dream

nothing is wasted
not even pain . . .

And while the first poem in the book tells us that "mountain tree water wolf/dinosaur sun moon/they are the world/apart from us," the last poem announces that "the wolfs howl wears us/so intimate we belong to it." These statements are not a contradiction but rather opposite sides of a

situation, as in Yeats' later poems. Knoepfle had moved from the city (St. Louis) to the country (Auburn, Illinois) by now, and the country and its people restored much of his earlier tragicomedy:

> george was
> digging around a stump
> he said they tell me
> the rich has as much troubles
> as the poor do
> now how in the hell is that
> possible . . .
> ("a gathering of voices")

And the poems once more can have titles. In *A Box of Sandalwood* (1979), the problems have not disappeared, but time and space and land are restoratives:

> you dont have to be afraid
> take care of yourself
> you know it does not matter
> we were not very good lovers
>
> it is an indirect suggestion
> the burgundy sun slipping under
> this level prairie
>
> there will be some yesterday
> when we will be stunned with joy . . .

Broadway musicals can prattle about "Tomorrow;" but the apparently lesser consolation, that "there will be some yesterday," means that there is a Today, and that seems to be all we can expect or have any right to expect.

Selected Poems is a major achievement by any critical standards, as well as showing a contemporary poet trudging his long and arduous road. But it is far from the end of Knoepfle's career. *Poems from the Sangamon* may even outdo *Selected Poems;* in any case, it shows that Knoepfle's themes and techniques continue to grow and deepen: the rivers of thought and words still silt into islands of poetry which in turn still divert their rivers.

A complete analysis of the book would take as much space as the preceding review of Knoepfle's career to date. But we can point to accomplishments, to solutions of previous problems, and to concerns finding clearer statements and sometimes resolutions — and sometimes continuing to find that resolutions are not possible.

In this book, Knoepfle's personas take on more and more of their own lives. The Midwestern talk, generalized into a way of saying things, can now also discriminate. We hear from Indians in the deep past (and possibly in the present; time past interpenetrates time present as deeply

here as anywhere in Knoepfle's work), from early settlers, from modern men in barber shops and cafes. "He do the Midwest in Many Voices:"

> you want to get to kincaid
> you drive down this road
> turn west just before taylorville
> you pass the dump on your left then
> reach kincaid at the river
> or east of it I guess
> ("bulldog crossing")

> when someone dies in monticello
> they put him out in the yard
> you can always tell which ones is shrubs
> because no family lets a starling
> sit in a relative
> ("lunch room, new berlin")

> husband to wife with a camera
> can you get the whole tomb
> no she says from the viewfinder
> but Ive got mr lincoln I think . . .
> ("lincoln tomb, a report")

And of course, his own voice, now part of the landscape, the weather, and the times:

> this is a country of moraines
> old prairie could have
> gone on forever

> mounds timbers points
> groves islands savannas
> a language of prairies . . .
> ("east in mclean county")

As in the Missouri state park poems, Knoepfle has found a way to enunciate the land as if it were a found poem edging onto the page:

> sunny ridges in prairie shadow
> roses in the long valley
> yellow daisy purple mint

> golden alexander lead plant
> chokecherry osage plum
> cordgrass maidens tresses

> the dream we woke from
> before we were ready . . .
> ("hill prairie")

But though that poem ends with a sense of loss, and our world is viewed with a sardonic eye at times ("la avenida de las grain elevators"), and some people are selling their farms at auction, our world can make its catalog poems too:

and gear case housings stove knob inlays
creeper wheel assemblies potato chips
so many things here this very thingness
smolders in the whorls of our fingers . . .
("decatur")

We still make the same old mistakes, as the poet tells the shade of Vachel Lindsay, when he has followed the Sangamon to Springfield:

vachel we dont know
what to do with our lives
how fill them up
how not even to be self conscious
our successes squeezed from us
despite our failings and yet
there are some like figures
on a cave wall
and when we find them
they teach us and we change . . .
("snowflakes and recorders")

These figures, offering hope, are not necessarily well known. One is a candidate for Sangamon Country Fair Princess:

but to be spellbound
that is special
that is when the tv news
calls us to lives
where everything is lost
and people stand
somewhere else in their shadows
and they win over cruelty
. . . . . .
it puts a stitch in my heart
seeing them like that
those good prairie people
facing what is beyond them
in every direction . . .

"What is beyond them" is perhaps beyond their power to cure, perhaps beyond their understanding, but it is also physically beyond them, in the prairie and the marshes and the rivers stretching everywhere, and it is possible to unite with it. We are not surprised that an Indian can do this,

trusting his own culture
walking the continent
simply at home,
("mano")

but on his home grounds, where the river runs near, the poet can do it as well:

my footprint in this place
with the deer the dog the racoon
and the silt that levels them . . .
("lick creek my own branch")

And the silt is not a negative image (is it the silt that silted into islands?).

As the book draws towards its close and the Sangamon runs into the Illinois (momentous here, as when the Liffey runs into the sea), old wounds get healed by agreement:

time for the trumpeter
and the echoing trumpeter
time for saying the wrong things
time for the dead to forgive us . . .
("memorial day camp butler")

The Princess Candidate approaches with her message of survival quoted above. An old priest, in a religious poem from which redfaced Monsignori and pushing reporters are absent, offers us good wishes from country life "where time is unthinkable"—as when we returned from Elephant Rocks, time's captive again, but "not quite again," and we learn

the sangamon is a living current
that does not abide still water . . .
("late winter in menard county")

It will support us and gives us the good land. In a "poem for scott lucas" (U. S. Senator during the Truman administration who was among the architects of the Marshall Plan and Point Four, born along the Sangamon in Havana), we learn that though small river towns have died and the ducks are scarce,

. . . the long delicate raincats
they coax the soil up rich again
a honeymouthed eurydice
fields heaved out in rows by the mile
with melons an autumn moon cries over
. . . . . .
one more generous harvest . . .

And at last we are at the confluence, where

it was always more than dawn
that we looked for
something that we had not seen
as we watched here
gathered from the ashes of our vision . . .

This Phoenix-like vision seems to unite present and past:

may new prayers and new fires
the beloved pleiades
welcome the kickapoo home . . .

And even though the best we can hope for is that subjunctive, the book ends calmly and with hope that

> this world in peace
> this laced temple of darkening colors
> it could not have been made for shambles . . .

No subjunctive there, though there could have been. And lastly, the Sangamon, Knoepfle's most recent river, joins greater rivers and the great mythic past:

> it is long miles through marshgrass
> the sangamon sifting to its ending
> and beyond us the illinois
> intensifies south
> beneath the eagles at grafton
> our ancient mississippi
> its wide slow waters . . .
> ("confluence")

So Knoepfle's rivers keep silting into islands, and yet the rivers still run. Some of the themes that have vexed the poems and the nation have found a place and a meaning. The Sangamon's voyage is not long by miles, not prominent on maps, but it is the latest and greatest of Knoepfle's river muses, and like the others, no matter where we live it is ours. Is us.

NOTES

[1]The sections of *Selected Poems* are named for the volumes in which they first appeared as books.

[2]The original of this poem was more specific, as the speaker ate a hamburger under a sign reading "We reserve the right to refuse service to anyone," replaced in the later version by "sexy postcards," leaving the reader somewhat at a loss.

[3]Underdog's non-superhero incarnation was "a humble shoeshine boy."

> Good creatures, do you love your lives,
> Or have you ears for sense?
> Here is a knife like other knives
> That cost me eighteen pence:
>
> I need but stick it in my heart
> And down will come the sky,
> And earth's foundations will depart
> And all you folk will die.
> (*More Poems*, xxvi)

I do not know if Knoepfle borrowed this knowingly, but Housman is not a bad poet for Shoeshine Boy to be reading in the Viet Nam days, and he probably would be approved by the Kiwanis, though they might murmur at his pessimism.

[5]"Shut ins" are places in which an Ozark river flows among rock outcroppings.

[6]A state park in Missouri, not far from the "shut ins" of the previous poem. All the places in this sequence can be reached in a single day's drive from St. Louis.

[7]In Elephant Rocks State Park, Missouri. (The new road approaches the rocks from the other side, so some of Knoepfle's views are hard to retrieve).

HISTORY AND DRAMATIC FORM: THE LAKE ARGYLE PROJECT

Bruce H. Leland

In the summer of 1832 Abraham Lincoln joined a volunteer militia in Illinois and, as the television commercial reminds us, was soon chosen Captain. At the same time Chief Black Hawk was being pursued north to Wisconsin, after the Indian victory at Stillman Run. And in that same year hundreds of young married couples in western Illinois faced the hardships of frontier life. Certainly some quarrelled, maybe even came close to separating as they were beset by illness, bad weather, and the problems of isolation.

It's of the first two events that history plays are usually made, at least history plays in the tradition of Shakespeare, Corneille, and Jonson. Even in the twentieth century, plays such as Shaw's *St. Joan*, Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, and Kopit's *Indians* are based on major recorded events in the lives of public figures. Indeed, a history play, by definition as well as by example, is seen as the dramatization of great historical events.

It is no wonder, then, with this great tradition of dramatizing history as a model, that playwrights dealing with the local history of their communities will do likewise. It is customary for such playwrights to choose as their subject the locally important "historical" figures and the well known "major events." And so we have the reenactment of the battle at Concord Bridge; *The City of Joseph* in Nauvoo; the Lincoln-Douglas debates restaged at their original locations. It's hard to imagine any community's celebration of its history without a dramatic presentation.

In any western Illinois community the audience which gathers in the high school gym for the historical play can expect to see several predictable events. A group of men will gather to draw up the town's charter. An Indian war will be reenacted. Abraham Lincoln will visit and make a speech. Perhaps an escaping slave will pass through the underground railroad.

Such dramatizations of local history serve to give information, to spark community pride, and to put a lot of actors on the stage. And they are based on history, just as much as Bolt's *A Man For All Seasons* or Buchner's *Danton's Death*. But unlike those plays, "The 150 Years of Centerville History" is not likely to be read with enthusiasm by drama

students or revived by the community theatre. The action of the play is likely to be of very little interest to anyone outside the Centerville community. Even students of regional literature are likely to pay little attention to local history plays.

Of course, we might say: after all, the local playwright is not a professional writer. But amateurs do write successful plays in a variety of genres, and regional writers are often able to hold our interest. The problem with the typical local history play lies in a lack of appropriate structure and scope. The playwright confines himself to the recorded history of his community, which is to say the problem more fundamentally lies with the available historical material.

Recall the events enacted in classic historical dramas. We see Anouilh's Beckett change his life in the face of new responsibilities. Eliot's Beckett is tempted to do the right thing for the wrong reasons. Shaw's St. Joan is torn between faith and fear, while Cauchon pursues justice amid growing certainty that he is wrong. Richard II, in Shakespeare's play, is both contemptible and pitiable as he is unable to function in the role demanded of him. In these and other historical plays we see kings and saints and heroes struggling with recognizable dilemmas. They are caught in universal human conflicts. The conflicts may be on a grander scale than our own, but they do not differ in kind.

The conflicts dramatized in these history plays not only bring universal scope to historical events, but they also give the plays a dramatic form. We can see the beginning of the conflict, the complication, and the resolution. Unfortunately, however, only relatively few historical events embody conflicts which can assume this dramatic form. Hence the popularity of these few events with dramatists. Witness the number of plays dealing with Joan of Arc, Thomas à Beckett, and Mary, Queen of Scots. These stories are chosen because of the conflict and form inherent in them. For historical dramas, according to Herbert Lindenberger, "consist less of the historical materials on which they are purportedly based than on the theatrical conventions which give them their essential form."[1]

History by itself, then, may be reenacted, but that reenactment does not necessarily assume the conventions of dramatic structure. What if the hero of the local story died not at the stake but in his bed? Or what if his accomplishments were the chartering of a town, the founding of a college, or the development of an industry? And what if the history of the town involves many men, with no single dominating hero? What if there were no dramatic resolutions of conflict? The result will be the typical local history play. We can call it pageantry: historical reenactment without dramatic form or universal human appeal. An audience with an inherent interest in the history gathers for a ceremonial celebration of it.

In 1980, the Lake Argyle Project began with the purpose of presenting local history plays which would also succeed as drama. Accordingly, there

were no famous characters in *The Peddler,* which received its first performance in June of 1980 in Lake Argyle State Park, Colchester, Illinois. There were no events of the sort recorded in county histories. In fact, the characters in the play and the specific events were clearly fictional. And yet they were very real. Their conflicts were understandable, and their story took recognizable form. By means of fiction, pageantry was avoided and noteworthy drama was the result.

With funding from the Illinois Arts Council, the Illinois Humanities Council, Western Illinois University, and Argyle Lake State Park, the author, director, actors, and producers of *The Peddler* sought to recreate the frontier life of some ordinary people, people whose stories were never recorded and so must be discovered in fiction. In the tradition of Brecht's *Mother Courage* the play presented fictional characters in a historical situation. The facts of frontier life were there: the Black Hawk War, the heavy snows, the infant mortality. Furthermore, the historical location was there. The play (and its successors) was performed in front of a reconstructed log cabin in an undeveloped area of the park.[2] Author Jared Brown took the world of the western Illinois frontier, placed in it three fictional characters, and watched what happened to them.

In doing so, he created a sense of history, a feeling for the past of the local community. In his "Introduction" to *Western Illinois Heritage* John Hallwas writes:

> As American culture becomes increasingly homogenized, there is a need for people to rediscover the local and regional past, which frequently offers the vitality and depth of cultural distinction. Indeed, history allows individuals to fully inhabit the places where they reside. And it is not the assortment of names and dates from the past that gives people a sense of the deep relationship to the world of their immediate experience, but the body of significant stories: historical episodes, notable lives, and literary texts. These have an impact on the individual's sense of place. They allow him to interact imaginatively with earlier eras and to share the spirit and struggle of previous generations. Ultimately, they encourage him to accept responsibility for the future in his locality.[3]

What happened to Samuel and Elizabeth McCrea in *The Peddler* is one such "significant story" which gives a sense of place. It is a story which very likely did occur in many frontier families. They came to western Illinois full of great expectations. Yet the frontier seemed to defeat them at every turn. Their children died, one by one, the last of cholera. Elizabeth is fatigued and weakened by illness. The forest has been harder to clear than they anticipated. There is little to eat. The hardships have strained the marriage relationship almost to the breaking point. Only a stranger, a peddler who has seen other struggles on the frontier, is able to present a perspective which allows hope.

The Peddler presented fictional characters in a real historical situation. It allowed the audience to witness a recognizable conflict. And the action, an hour in the lives of three people, falls into a dramatic pattern of expositon, complication, and resolution.

Succeeding plays at Lake Argyle took similar form. In Brown's 1981 play, *The Preacher,* the plot unfolds as two fictional characters, the wife and daughter of a coal miner, seek to uncover the past of a wandering preacher. Not surprisingly, that past has been as a company spy in a coal miner's union. In this play tragedy is not entirely averted, as the coal miner husband, missing from the outset, is reported dead at the end of the play. Nonetheless, the three characters we have come to know have faced their conflicts, both external and internal, and begun to resolve them.

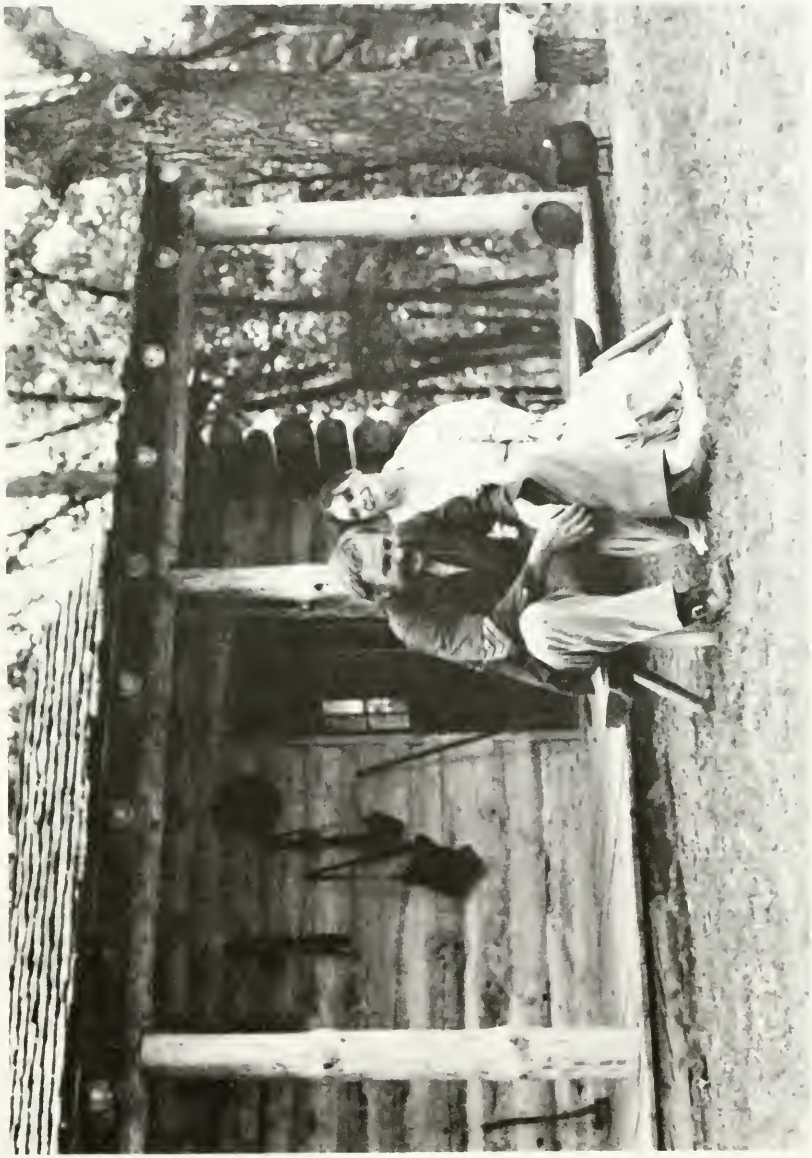
The third Argyle play, *The Conflict,* by John Hallwas, is set during the Civil War. But rather than present the war through the public oratory of the period, or through the reinactment of an historic meeting, Hallwas offers fictional characters in a dramatic pattern: a father returning from the war confronts a wife who wants him to remain at home and a son who wants to join the army himself. Against the conflict of the war we see a family conflict; it is eventually resolved as the wife agrees to let husband and son both return to battle.

In *The Homestead,* by Sue Mietus, the conflict develops over the deed to a plot of land. Rooted particularly strongly in local history, the play grows from the practice of outsiders purchasing deeds to land after a homestead has been established. A homesteader was always in danger that an unscrupulous intruder would purchase the land from under him. In *The Homestead* Micah, a former resident of western Illinois, returns and purchases the deed to John's farm. When Micah's wife discovers what her husband has done, she struggles first with herself then with Micah to achieve justice.

The Paper Town, written in collaboration by Gene Kozowski and John Hallwas, is the most recent play in the series. It, too, focuses on issues of land and ownership, particularly with the attempts of entrepreneurs to build new communities by advertising for settlers in eastern newspapers. In *The Paper Town* a sincerely well-intentioned woman, Winifred Soaper, seeks to keep alive her late husband's dream of founding a city in a barren patch of wilderness. We see her try to convince the first respondents to her husband's advertisement that they should settle in the town which exists only on paper.

Called a comedy by its authors, largely due to its lighter tone, *The Paper Town* actually fits the same dramatic structure as the other Argyle plays. A small group of characters comes into conflict. It may be a husband and wife, as in *The Peddler* and *The Conflict,* or two men with claims to the land, as in *The Homestead,* or strangers who need something from one another, as in *The Preacher* and *The Paper Town.* In each case the conflict is at least partially resolved by the end of the play. Tragedy threatens: the family may break up or the land may be lost, but out of it all emerges a happy ending. In his study of dramatic form in *The Life of the Drama,* Eric Bentley classifies such a plot structure as tragicomedy.

The plot of *The Healers,* written in 1984 by Gene Kozlowski (assisted by

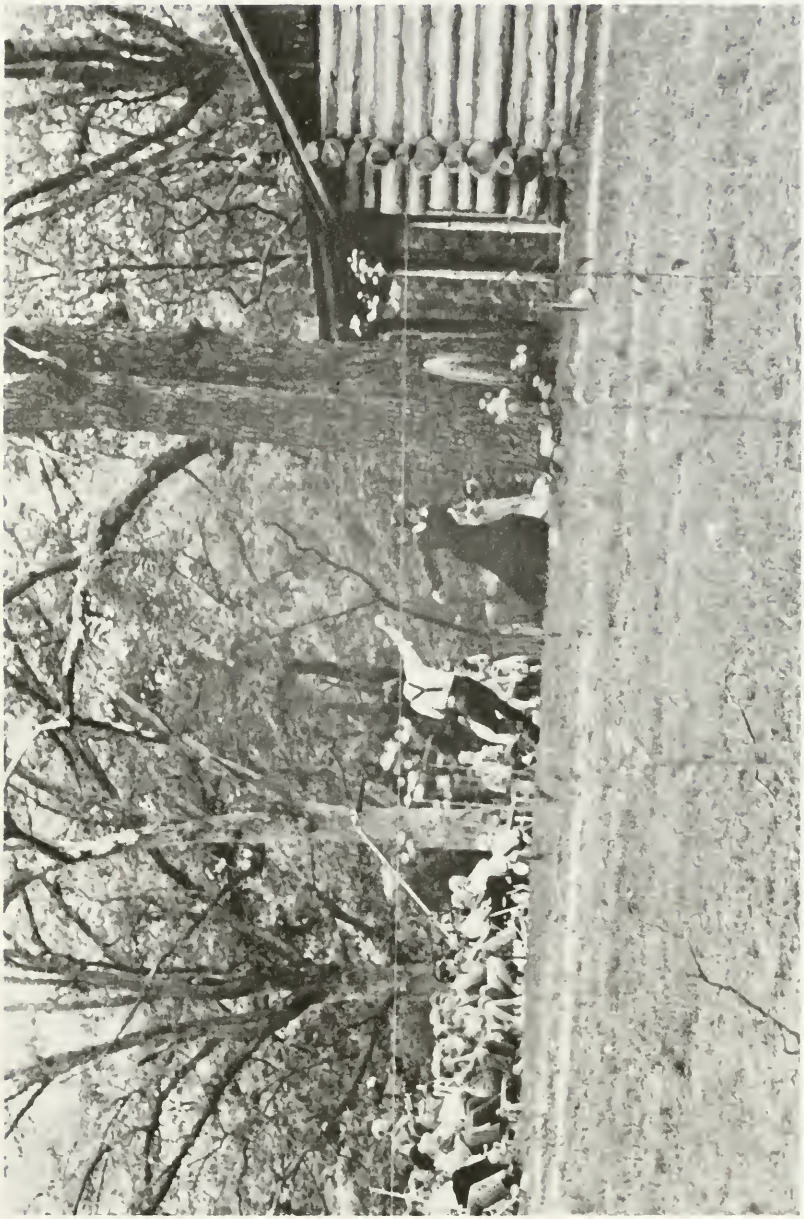


A scene from *The Conflict*. Veteran Argyle Park actors Gene Kozlowski and Catherine Landis.

An argument erupts in *The Conflict*, with Landis, Kozlowski and Mike Lubek.

The audience watches a scene from *The Healers*. Gene Kozlowski and Nancy Selby.

The Paper Town begins with period songs performed by the cast: Randy Smith, Paul Cioe, Catherine Landis, and seated, Judy Brown, Sherry Lavington and Dale Pickens.



A scene from *The Paper Town*, showing the audience, acting area, and log cabin.

Video taping a scene from *The Paper Town*. Sherry Lavington, Catherine Landis, Dale Pickens and Judy Brown.

Mark Beyermann) perhaps best demonstrates this tragicomic structure of the Argyle history plays. The family of Elizabeth Weaver has been attacked by one of the most feared enemies on the frontier: cholera. Her husband and son are ill with cholera-like symptoms; there is a confirmed cholera outbreak in nearby Macomb; a cholera epidemic eight years earlier had been particularly devastating. Mrs. Weaver is near despair, a despair deepened by a conflict of wills developing around her.

Two people offering aid arrive almost simultaneously at the Weaver cabin. The first is Dr. Bates, a country doctor able to set broken bones and perform routine surgery, but admittedly ignorant of treatments for disease. The second, Annabelle Franklin, admits no such ignorance. She is positive in her diagnosis, her herbal treatments, her gloomy prognosis, and her religious duty. Even as she treats the patients with pigweed, raw onions, and ashes, she declares that cholera is God's punishment for sin, and urges prayer for the almost certainly damned souls.

Mrs. Weaver is about to accept Annabelle's fatalistic vision, when Dr. Bates determines that the husband and son do not have cholera and will recover. Cholera, he points out, kills its victims very quickly. Mrs. Weaver's family has been sick too long. If it had been cholera, they would be dead by now. Thus, Mrs. Weaver has weathered the potential tragedy. The men will not die — this time. And as a result of the experience, Mrs. Weaver has learned something about herself and grown stronger. At the same time the doctor and the faith healer have been forced by the conflict to examine themselves and to forgive one another.

Such a plot structure fits the definition of tragicomedy offered by several literary critics, but most clearly by Bentley.[4] Serious tragedy threatens in *The Healers* and in the other Argyle plays — not merely death, but also destruction of plans, dreams, and well-being — yet in each play the worst does not happen. The central characters survive the threatened catastrophe, and further, they learn and grow as a result of their experiences.

This is not mere melodramatic avoidance of the tragedy. Innocence has not arbitrarily triumphed over evil. The tragedy, in Bentley's terms, has not been merely averted, but transcended. It has been turned into something else. It has been transformed into an oppportunity to understand the human condition and to act on that understanding.

In the tragicomic *The Healers,* tragedy is not merely averted. To be sure, the two patients do not die, but the resolution of the conflict is in the transcendence of the potential tragedy. Elizabeth, Annabelle, and Dr. Bates all change as a result of the experience. In the face of death, and confronted with irreconcilable differences, they admit their fears, find new strength, and reach new understanding. They survive.

Significantly, there are no villains defeated in the play. The evil is not in the characters, but around and beyond them. It is the common enemies of disease and ignorance and misunderstanding. Dr. Bates is not wrong in his inability to cure cholera, nor is Isabelle malicious in her dogmatism.

Nor, further, is Elizabeth's despair an indication of evil or sinfulness. Indeed, the worthiness of each character is revealed, finally, as the transcendence of tragedy begins.

Elizabeth, through the experience, discovers new strength and independence, essential qualities for survival on the frontier. Annabelle, after the crisis, softens her dogmatic tone and admits: "I forget that people can. . . love each other with the strength and power that you love your family. I have had to put all my love in God."[5] And Dr. Bates, who had resisted and ridiculed Annabelle's religion, talks of his prayers, prayers for understanding of a world where cholera could kill so many, including his own son. The characters move beyond the conflict to an understanding of themselves and of one another. And "in art," Lindenberger notes, "if not always in life, understanding is tantamount to forgiving."[6]

Eric Bentley suggests that such forgiveness is one characteristic of the tragicomic genre. Indeed, it gives shape and form to one type of tragicomedy, just as revenge gives form to one type of tragedy. In these plays, he asserts, "forgiveness is achieved with difficulty; and . . . there is drama in the difficulty, the conflict, through which it is achieved. Forgiveness is an alternate reaction to revenge, and can be understood — functionally speaking — as revenge is understood."[7]

The characters in *The Healers,* as well as those in the other Argyle plays, begin to understand one another. Through the pain of their conflict, they struggle through to an appreciation of their differing motives. They forgive one another, and they forgive themselves.

The conflict in *The Healers,* then, is not a melodramatic conflict between good and evil, but between human beings with a common end who differ in the means to that end. Bates and Annabelle represent science and religion, skepticism and dogmatic assurance, trust that God will work through man and trust that He will work in spite of man. Neither is wholly good or wholly evil, but merely human. And it is in that humanness, that ambiguity, that fallibility, that the play transcends both melodrama and historical pageantry. Through fiction it becomes a dramatic statement about the past which helps us to understand our own present.

To be sure the conflict is "historical." The facts about cholera and its ravages are there. So are the facts about primitive medical practices and frontier religion. Local audiences learn about past events in their community about which they may have been unaware. Surely most of the audience for *The Healers* had been unaware that there had ever been a cholera epidemic in the county. Just as surely they had not in modern times experienced such a general threat to the health of the community. Through such exposition all of the Argyle plays offer facts about McDonough county during the past century.

But the play goes beyond that. It presents not just facts which may or may not be of interest to the campers, picnickers, amateur historians, avid play-goers, or friends of the cast which make up the audience. By imposing tragicomic structure on the play, by presenting a conflict

between fictional representatives of two recognizable ways of thought, the play speaks to our present as well as our past.

This structure growing out of an ambiguous conflict is more readily achieved in fiction than in the historical record. There is no dramatizable conflict in a speech by Lincoln or in the signing of a town's charter. The conflict is, instead, in the reactions of the unknown listeners or in the unrecorded lives of the townspeople. To understand our past, then, is to understand these unknown people through fiction.

History, in the words of Philip Sidney, is "captivated to the truth of a foolish world."[8] It does not always present itself in a suitable dramatic structure. Nor (and this was Sidney's concern) does it always offer stories which let us learn about our own lives. Yet, as Lindenberger notes about plays which combine fiction and history: "By freeing itself from the limitations imposed by a familiar historical action, a play of this sort can focus on the thematic content of the history."[9] That is, through fiction we can begin to interpret history, which is, after all, the real work of the historian.

NOTES

[1]Herbert Lindenberger, *Historical Drama: The Relation of Literature and Reality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), p.4.

[2]The same cabin has been the setting for each of the Argyle plays, providing both another unity among the plays and another challenge for the author. The plays must be set in the frontier period, when such cabins were common, or they must contain exposition which explains why the cabin is in use. In *The Preacher,* set in 1899, Brown had to include an explanation that poverty had forced the family to live in such primitive and "old-fashioned" quarters.

[3]John Hallwas, *Western Illinois Heritage* (Macomb: Illinois Heritage Press, 1983), p. 2.

[4]See for instance, Ruby Cohn, *Currents in Contemporary Drama* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969) and Karl S. Guthke, *Modern Tragicomedy* (New York: Random House, 1966). Bentley's discussion of tragicomedy begins on page 316 of *The Life of the Drama* (New York: Atheneum, 1975).

[5]Gene Kozlowski, with Mark Beyermann, *The Healers* (MS in archives, Western Illinois University Library, Macomb, Illinois, with MSS of all plays in the series).

[6]Lindenberger, p. 41.

[7]Bentley, p. 329.

[8]Sir Philip Sidney, "The Defense of Poesy," *Selected Poetry and Prose,* ed. Robert Kimbrough (San Francisco: Rinehart Press, 1969), p. 121.

[9]Lindenberger, p.25.

MVR AT FIFTEEN

John Mann

A famous poet once said that "editing a literary magazine is an act of love, or madness, or both." As a veteran of twelve years with one "little" magazine, I can confirm the madness if not the love. Small magazines, it sometimes seems, exist in a shadow world of low circulations, disappearing budgets, rising paper and print costs, and the perpetual struggle to find good material. Many literary magazines last only a season or two. Few can pay their contributors. Ephemeral by definition, they lean toward the experimental and the non-commercial. Yet these magazines have registered an impact far out of proportion to their size, for they have published — often introduced — most of the major literary talents of this century. Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, Robert Lowell — all published poems first in little magazines.

It is hard to account for the persistance of literary magazines in the face of profound economic (and human) odds. Who reads them? Writers, assuredly — especially young, talented poets and short story writers to whom the major literary outlets in New York and Chicago seem irrevocably closed. Young writers must publish, must have the sense that someone appreciates their work; young writers must seek out an audience of peers, fellow writers who can criticize, cajole, correspond with, and support. Literary magazines have especially answered this last need: they are poetry and fiction "workshops" for writers widely scattered in geographical space. There is also the remarkable persistance of a general audience for good writing, an immensely loyal group of people who love poetry and fiction. It is unwise to underestimate the size of this audience, as commercial publishers often do.

How does the editor of a literary magazine see all this? Like Dr. Johnson's lexicographer, he or she is a harmless drudge, buried in hundreds or thousands of submitted manuscripts, harassed by deadlines, struggling to keep the ship afloat for just one more issue. But the fundamental hunger remains: the hope, the powerful need to discover an unknown talent whose published words will be incandescent. For most editors I know, this hope is worth any sacrifice.

Since the *Mississippi Valley Review* has reached the ripe age of fifteen, somehow beating the odds against survival to such longevity, it seems an

appropriate moment to look back. As the major literary magazine in West-Central Illinois, and as a magazine which has been very receptive to Illinois writers and artists, *MVR* possesses a distinct regional interest. Can a regional definition — a special angle of vision — emerge from the writing in *MVR?* Fifteen Illinois writers, stretching back twelve years in *MVR's* pages, have been singled out for literary awards by the Illinois Arts Council. Considering these a generous sampling from the life of *MVR,* why did we choose these writers, and what does their work say about our region and our state? Does their work endure? Our cover artists — all Illinois painters, printmakers, or photographers — will have something important to add to the story of *MVR* in western Illinois.

What strikes one first about the seven winning *MVR* fiction entries is their irrepressible variety. They differ widely in place and theme. Two stories — Daniel Curley's "Legends of our Fathers" and Warren Dwyer's "Down Among the Geordies" — are set in England. Curley's story recounts a zany modern-day pilgrimage to Canterbury: the characters march through the snow "blood-shod," arriving at their destination exactly at the moment a critical life decision must be made. In Dwyer's tale an American narrator's appearance in working-class Durham receives humorous welcome when the "Geordies" discover he is from Peoria, Illinois. He encounters a jazz band, one of whose novelty numbers is "I Wish I Was In Peoria." The other five award-winning stories are set in the United States, though not always in an identifiable place. The funniest, Dennis McInerny's "Stimulus and Response," shows a bizarre book-reviewer for the *Star-Journal* (the midwest city looks a lot like Peoria) writing mad letters of response to a correspondent critical of his book reviews. The landscape of Quincy writer Linda Ross Beuchting's "The Magic Ring" remains the kitchen, bedroom, and interior self of a woman succumbing to depression. Julie A. McFarland — a Rock Island writer whose "A View of Death" won the most recent award in June, 1985 — conceives her story in the terrified consciousness of a grandson watching his grandmother's dissolution and death.

Only two of the stories announce an Illinois or a midwestern setting. Daniel Curley's "Domino XXX" — the most technically daring of the awards group — counterpoints a boy fishing in a rural stream against his grown-up encounter with pain and abortion. Murray Moulding's "Goat-fate," set in a Wisconsin farm, most overtly suggests the look and feel of Illinois farmland (Moulding wrote the story while living on a farm near Monmouth, Illinois). Here the rocky marriage of a city couple receives ambiguous support from woods, cornfields, and an old barn in a story whose dramatic center is the murder of a goat. One discerns especially in Curley's and Moulding's stories a powerful awareness of both the attractions and costs of rural life, in which our compelling moments occur in profound human isolation. All of them reverberate with an oddness, an

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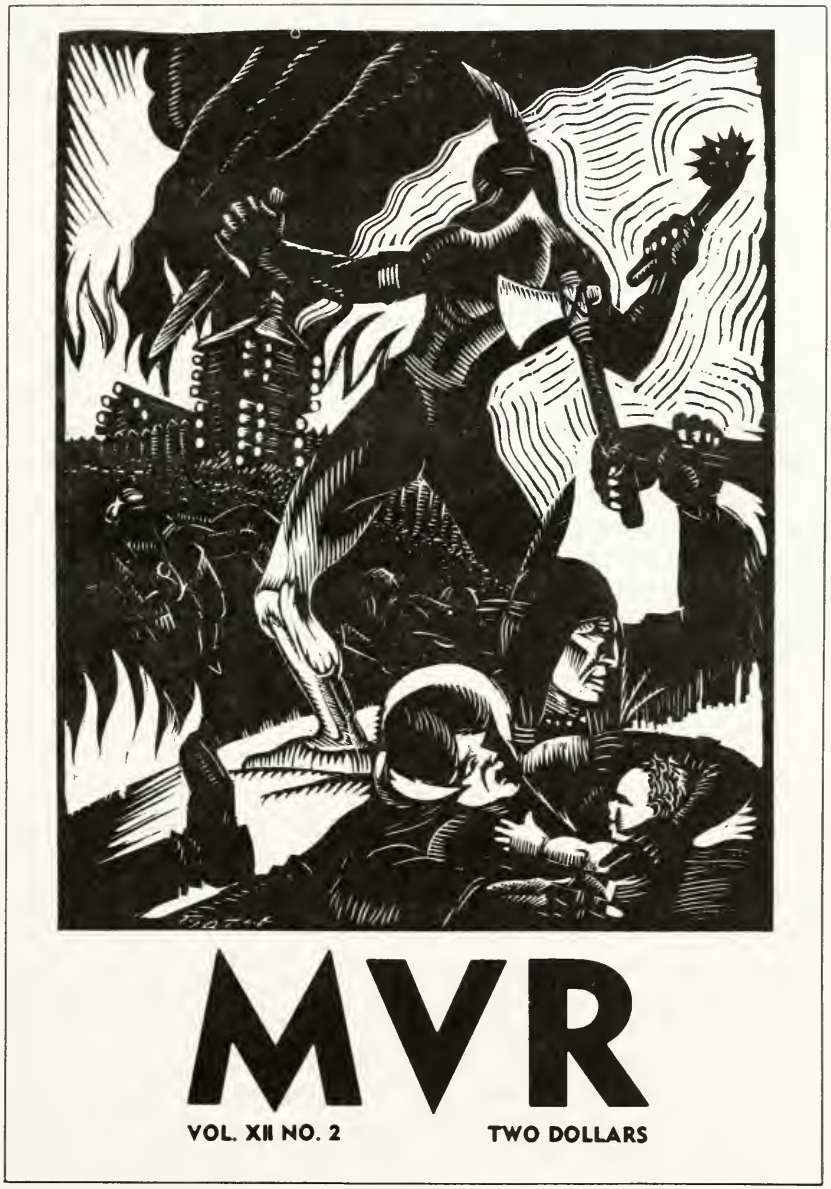
The first issue of MVR.



A recent issue of MVR. The cover art work is "Fort Dearborn Massacre," a relief print by Charles Turzok from the permanent collection of the Western Illinois University Art Gallery.

around-the-corner sense of apartness that may suggest a "forgotten" region.

Symbols and moments of aloneness are also not lacking in the eight award-winning poems from *MVR's* first fifteen years. In the poets, however, one confronts more private and local sensibilities, an art that grows more emphatically from self and place. These selves and places are of course not all regional or midwestern. Bloomington poet James McGowan, for example, begins his "Maine Sestina"

> Rippling his restlessness, the cove
> Reflects in wrinkles shadows, clouds.
> The sun is briefly under, seas
> Have business outwards, where the islands
> Bristle; we can watch the sailboats
> Do their turns, from our grand house.

From a secluded cove at the tip of Mr. Desert Island McGowan rings his intricate changes on sky, self, and sea, building an island life seemingly far removed from central Illinois. Laurence Lieberman's "An Exit From Dates" follows a nameless teacher of literature through a series of days in an unnamed college's classroom: "Fantasy stirs in confinement. Book-/Margins are annotated with doodle./A restless body girds/The mind to resist what is cold or brutal./The teacher quizzes the pupil's abstracted look./Lips grope for words." At the end of part IV — "The Lost Faces" — Lieberman (a professor at the University of Illinois) records his teacher's summarizing desperation:

> The maps and photos curl on smoke-colored
> Wall, and mildew under glass.
> The poets are at the window.
> If I can but see them pass,
> Their breath returns, and the students are not bored.
> Eyes say it is so.

In "Show and Tell" Macomb poet Mary Wehring offers a bizarre fantasy of a secretary showing off a new engagement ring to her co-workers:

> The next day I took the ring to show and tell.
> Edith, Ramona, Nancy, and the head secretary, Mrs. Randall,
> sat in a wide-eyed row behind their typewriters.
> I said, "This is my engagement ring.
> It's nearly a full half-carat.
> It cost well over a thousand dollars.
> John gave it to me.
> He's my fiance.
> And you should be jealous."
> Then I sat down and there was wild applause.

The editors admired the loony wit of Wehring's fantasy, which demonstrates the paradoxical capacity of a good poem to uncover real

feeling within the myth. We admired McGowan's precise description and Lieberman's willingness to face down and write about unpleasant — but ultimately worthy — experience. The most haunting and mysterious of this latter kind of poem in our group is Helen Valenta's "Sometimes in the Grey of Mirrors." Valenta's acute perception reminds us of the way a poem can drive to the heart of self-knowledge — that kind of knowledge ordinary experience does not always yield:

> Though this dark
> wine clots in your mouth
>
> and your veins pulse like stirred ground; do
> you really want to know every dark
>
> vestibule of your brain pulsing;
> your hand, something being wrapped, shadows . . .

Our remaining four poems suggest closer connections between poet and region. Julie Siegel's "Quincy Under Snow" reveals winter overlooking the Mississippi River with chilling clarity:

> On the bluff
> there is no sound
>
> Save the wind
> flapping against itself
> as a duck's wing might
> snap its feather free
> from a pane
>
> Flat pressed
> from pond water . . .

Notable here are the metaphors connecting inhuman nature with the animal world and the unseen watcher on the bluff. For Chicago poet Michael Miner, recently of Jacksonville, Illinois, the city winterscape in "First Snow" is quite different: "You move with the crowds/through the city's first snow/carrying your death inside you/like a dirty book/in a plain brown wrapper." Between the Chicago of Miner, Sandburg, and Dreiser, and the Quincy bluffs of Siegel, one lines out a landscape poem of Illinois winter.

It is an even longer way from James Ballowe's Peoria to the opening settings of his poem "Survival": "We have come this way before:/the Bäckmulde by the Neckar,/down pillows, a flowered patio above the street./Firenze. Merano./Lucid, cool windmill evenings./These good things." Despite the opening geography, "Survival" in fact lives within a consciousness of western Illinois. Last night's sun falling "like a yolk from the shell," a "pimpled waitress who takes our order wrong," "the pigeon traps" — these evoke a world closer to the prairies. At its conclusion, Ballowe's poem specifies survival as the condition of a specific place:

We float in solution,
as if conception were all there is.
We are certain of the beginning.
The earth swallows the yolk and deposits an orange.
That alone makes our day.

Whose landscape is it that Chicago poet Ralph J. Mills, Jr. captures in "Song"?

One branch
—no, almost a
dozen
the knotted &
splay twigs
come clear
in the window
leafing or
as now
in—
leaved
with a few
fingertips
scarlet
under cold November's
sun
& this "sky full of islands"
you said:
clouds
broken & afloat
in blue
"o utterly blue" air
while below
the tree's spiked
shadow leans across grass-stalks
stiff with frost—

Is this delicate, almost Japanese touch something an Illinois landscape taught him?

Perhaps it would be equally true to say that our poets and fiction writers have taught our part of the state and country to feel and to see, creating angles of perception we can inhabit, arenas of insight we can own. What was unknown or unsubdued in western Illinois is perhaps mapped, if not realized, as a result of their work. Let none of this be forgotten, let much be known, our writers say to us. But the "knowing" these works offer cannot be anything as simple as a city, or a river, or a county. These works live at the intersection of self and place. They chart the "internal difference" where — according to Emily Dickinson — "the meanings are."

Many of these poems and stories endure, confirming an editor's initial sense of worth. However, no assessment of *MVR* at fifteen could be

complete without a word about its cover art — to me, the crowning glory of each issue. Allen Schindle, James Neumann, Samuel Parker, Frederick Jones, Terry Newell, Joel Smith, Richard Law, and Ann Mullin are all Illinois painters, printmakers, and photographers. Not all the names are well-known, but *MVR* has become known — with whatever dramatic impact — in large measure because of their work. Each issue engraves its cover most strongly on my memory. Hence, Fred Jones' "Winter Landscape" on the front of the spring, 1985 issue: one sees an immense panorama of plowed fields, partially covered with snow but displaying underneath the black Illinois earth which lines the snowy fields in intricate patterns. Lone trees mark the top of one field, and at the bottom are the tangled remains of last fall's crop. The landscape seems to go on forever, as western Illinois fields in winter do. Fred Jones grew up in Wales, got transplanted to Pittsburgh, then to Madison, Wisconsin, and finally to West-Central Illinois. It took a Welsh painter to make me truly see the Illinois landscape. But that is the paradox of art and writing in western Illinois, at least from the perspective of fifteen years of *MVR*.

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NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

Editor's Note

"Other Voices from Western Illinois" is the third in a series of *Western Illinois Regional Studies* special issues. It was time, the editors thought, to devote an issue to literature. Almost ten years ago, John Hallwas, chair of our editorial board, co-edited with Dennis J. Reader *The Vision of This Land: Studies of Vachel Lindsay, Edgar Lee Masters, and Carl Sandburg.* Though those three authors seem to both dominate and epitomize the literature or our region, we know that there are other writers, past and present, in whose work this region finds a voice. This issue demonstrates that though these voices may not be household names, they are indeed varied and vigorous.

This issue is bound together by some interesting parallels between our opening and closing essays. Of course it is appropriate to remark that this year, 1985, is the centennial of the birth of Marjorie Allen Seiffert and that William Roba's essay observes and celebrates her work, but I want also to note that Seiffert won two prizes from *Poetry* magazine and that it is this recognition for excellence in terms of awards received that John Mann focuses upon in reviewing the achievements of *Mississippi Valley Review* over the past fifteen years. Roba quotes from a New York critic, Clement Wood, who in 1920 wrote that Seiffert's work reflected "The sophistication of rural Illinois, rather than the sophistication of Chicago." How refreshing that today when we speak of sophistication — whatever it is — we are more apt to mean the degree of complexity in the literary work rather than a plus or minus degree of urbanity. Certainly the award-winning works which Mann discusses are sophisticated in ways of theme and technique which we hope, these 65 years later, Clement Wood would have seen. Our "regional" writers today seem more conscious of a complicated matrix of relationships between self, the self's immediate locale, and a larger — perhaps global — world through which the self can move unbounded by restrictions of space and time.

Floyd Dell, however, as Clarence Andrews' essay documents, followed the typical pattern for his time in ascending a ladder of sophistication which led from Barry, Illinois, to Quincy, to Davenport, to Chicago, to New York. Today, living in Auburn, Illinois, about three counties due east of

Barry, we find the poet John Knoepfle. Knoepfle might well relish the irony of having it said of his poetry that it reveals "the sophistication of rural Illinois," but Norman Hinton's perceptive reading of Knoepfle's poetry convincingly maps its intricate and universally human contours. Hinton shows how successfully Knoepfle captures the "folk speech" of the inhabitants of his land and how that speech is refracted in the richness of his own poetic voice. It is gratifying that 1985 also celebrates the publication of both Knoepfle's *A Circle of Stones: Selected Poems* and *Poems from the Sangamon.*

Historical drama is a curious genre. As Bruce Leland neatly observes, it is usually either about a famous person in a well-known situation or it is a pageant. Professional drama troupes perform the former while community troupes typically stage the latter. Leland describes the Lake Argyle Project as a successful solution to the problem of making historical drama both interesting as drama — not merely pageant — and significant as history without recognizable historical personages. These plays have been particularly effective because they have created characters who, while speaking our collective language, utter a variety of distinctly western Illinois voices.

Jay Balderson

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

TROUBLE ENOUGH: JOSEPH SMITH AND THE BOOK OF MORMON. By Ernest H. Taves. Buffalo, N. Y.: Prometheus Books, 1984. vii + 280 pp. Acknowledgments, author's note, illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. $16.95.

Even before the publication of the *Book of Mormon* in March 1830 genteel society tried to explain its origination in some way that would discount its authenticity as a historical work. Little has changed between 1830 and the present day. *Trouble Enough* is the latest of a long series of attempts to explain the *Book of Mormon's* appearance in other than miraculous terms. Unfortunately, it is a singularly disappointing one, for the author has taken new material sufficient for a single article and expanded it into a 300-page tome. As a result, only about 30 percent of the book deals with the questions raised concerning the *Book of Mormon,* and of this portion only a small amount is what might be called insightful information. The rest of the work is a very general, and incredibly simplistic, recitation of the history of the Mormon church from 1830 through the death of Joseph Smith, Jr., at Carthage Jail in 1844, a story that has been told much more adequately in numerous other publications.

This is not to suggest that in itself, the study of the origins of the *Book of Mormon* is not a worthwhile endeavor. Numerous writers have delved into this issue with commendable results. What little Ernest H. Taves has to add to this ongoing study, however, is worthy of our consideration. Taves, listed on the book's flyleaf as a psychiatrist and consultant to the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, expends considerable energy explaining and advancing the importance of a computer analysis of the text of the *Book of Mormon.* He insists that such an analysis can yield valuable information concerning the authorship of the *Book of Mormon.*

Stylometry, the technical term for computer analysis of literary texts, has been developed during the last twenty years into a useful, if not fully convincing, research tool. Essentially, stylometry involves a statistical study of vocabulary, resemblances between texts by a given author, and types and positions of words and phrases within texts. Each author, practitioners of stylometry contend, leaves a unique word pattern, or

wordprint, on his or her writings, even as a fingerprint is different from any other. If proper computer analysis is undertaken, if enough other texts are available for comparison, and if editorial work has not altered the author's wordprint, it might be possible to use this research tool as a means of determining authorship.

In a complex process the author compares three books of the *Book of Mormon,* presumably written by different authors as were the books of the *Bible,* with each other and with the *Book of Abraham,* another book translated by Joseph Smith, Jr., and accepted as scripture by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He contends that if the wordprints do not confirm multiple authorship, as Mormons believe, the authenticity of the *Book of Mormon* as a legitimate ancient record must be challenged. Not surprisingly, Taves concludes, "we may state that the tests here applied reveal no significant differences between the texts — which is to say that the texts provide no evidence of multiple authorship. The tests do not establish that the texts were written by a single author, but the results are entirely compatible with that hypothesis" (p. 260).

Although the author does not explicitly conclude that Joseph Smith, Jr. wrote the *Book of Mormon,* such is clearly his conception. This conclusion may be correct, but I doubt very seriously that *Trouble Enough* is the ultimate analysis of the subject. Taves' research methodology is questionable. For instance, one of the keys to stylometry is the placement of words other than nouns and verbs in sentences. If an individual has the habit of starting sentences with "And" or "But," this distinctive feature would be most important in any textual analysis. He admits that one of the so-called writers of the *Book of Mormon,* Nephi, began much of his work with the phrase "And it came to pass," and that this was a distinctly different style of sentence construction from that of the other sections in the test. Such a difference would tend to confirm multiple authorship of portions of the *Book of Mormon.* Yet Taves throws out this material as an anomaly without significance for his study.

Second, at least one other computer study of the *Book of Mormon* has been completed to date. Wayne A. Larsen, Alvin C. Rencher, and Tim Layton published an article discussing this subject in the Spring 1980 issue of *Brigham Young University Studies.* These individuals, using essentially the same process as described by Taves, came up with strikingly different results. They demonstrated, at least to their satisfaction, that there were at least 24 authors of the *Book of Mormon.* One can only suspect that with such a divergence of results from computer analysis of the *Book of Mormon* that this is one more instance of what some have observed as the fine art of jockeying figures to support certain theories. Perhaps the most famous instance of this phenomena within the historians' community came in 1974 with the publication of Robert W. Fogel's and Stanley L. Engerman's *Time on the Cross,* concerning slavery in the Old South.

It is indeed unfortunate that *Trouble Enough* is not a more satisfactory work. It raises some important questions about the coming forth of the *Book of Mormon,* but these are confined to only a few of its pages. Perhaps Taves will expand his computer study into a full-length treatment at some future date. As it is, however, few will find the book of great importance.

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ALONG THE BLACK HAWK TRAIL. By William F. Stark. Sheboygan, Wisconsin: Zimmermann Press, 1984. Pp. 213. $20.00.

On April 5, 1832, the Sauk Indian warrior Black Hawk violated a treaty he had signed a year earlier by crossing the Mississippi River into Illinois with his pro-British band of followers — some 1,200, including women and children. Although his intentions seemed peaceful — he was headed not back to his home village of Saukenuk but to a Winnebago village further up the Rock River — whites took no chances. By the time he had reached his destination, a loose confederation of volunteers, Illinois militia, and Federal troops from St. Louis had gathered to pursue the Indians. For the next four months, despite several attempts to surrender, Black Hawk and his band retreated up the Rock River into southern Wisconsin, outguessing and outmaneuvering the army of 4,500 whites. Starving and desperate, Black Hawk finally led his people west toward the Mississippi, where, on August 2, at the Battle of Bad Axe, a massacre ensued which left 150 Indians alive out of the original 1,200. Black Hawk himself was captured a few days later.

This skirmish came to be known as the Black Hawk War, though it was hardly a war in any traditional sense. It was of little actual importance in changing the course of American history, but it had all the makings of good story and legend: scalpings, kidnappings, bravery, ineptness of command, and a massacre. In addition, a number of its participants went on to later fame, among them Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, Zachary Taylor, and Winfield Scott. As a result, the Black Hawk War has remained popular among residents of northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin. In addition to providing a name for malls, restaurants, streets, and businesses, it has been the subject of many books, from juvenile fiction to the definitive, scholarly four-volume set by Ellen M. Whitney (*The Black Hawk War, 1831-32.* Springfield, IL: Illinois State Historical Library, 1970).

Why, then, another book about the Black Hawk War? William F. Stark's answer to that question in *Along the Black Hawk Trail* is that one

aspect of the war has never really been explored: "just what remains of the Black Hawk War today?" What evidence of the war would one find along the 600-mile trail? The answer, as Stark found, is "plenty." With a professional photographer, Don Davenport, Stark spent more than a year traveling along the route of the war, uncovering obscure markers, talking to present-day landowners, photographing and noting it all. The result is a 213-page account of the war itself and the remains of the war in the present landscape, illustrated by 175 color and black-and-white photographs and drawings, plus 10 detailed maps and charts. Stark and Davenport have produced an excellent guidebook for anyone interested in following the trail of that war or a part of it. An appendix provides a site by site guide to individual locations, and in many cases gives more detailed information than is available locally. Reading this guide, I was surprised to discover that I had been to many of these places without realizing their connection to Black Hawk.

In fact, both the text and the photographic record are so complete that one need not leave his or her armchair. Every marker is there to read, supplemented by many photographs of the landscape the way it must have looked to participants in 1832.

Stark defines himself as "an historian and writer by avocation" and identifies his audience as "the history buff or curious sightseer." His previous books have this same flavor (*Ghost Towns of Wisconsin*, for example), and I expected to find the usual coffee table text that goes with slick paper. I was pleasantly surprised, therefore, by both the quality of writing and the research that have gone into the book. He has read the major primary and secondary sources and has supplemented them by detailed visits to the sites. While his account is not analytical, and comes to no conclusions about the importance of the war or the reason it happened, he does provide the reader with a quite accurate account of events in a readable, generally chronological style. He does not take sides as many other accounts have done. The mixed motives of both Indians and whites involved are presented, and the reader is left to make up his or her own mind. The text is further clarified by excellent charts and maps of key sites, by an introductory chronology of the war, and by an appendix that gives short biographies of many of the important participants. In other words, Stark's Book fills in an important gap between the popular accounts of the war and the more scholarly accounts such as Whitney's.

A few errors do find their way into the text. Black Hawk's crossing of the Mississippi on April 5 did not take place "near Rock Island," as Stark says, but at Oquawka, far enough south of Rock Island to give troops two days advance notice before the Indians neared Saukenuk. Stark also refers to Black Hawk as a chief, a popular misconception even in Black Hawk's own time. Black Hawk was a warrior who led a pro-British band of renegade Sauks who resisted the leadership of the Sauk chief Keokuk. Stark's most glaring omission in the text is the failure to identify the Fox Indians as Mesquakie, their real name, and the name by which they prefer to be called

today. Fox was a derogatory name assigned to them by the French, and used in all white and Indian treaties in the 19th century, but it should not be perpetuated today.

Stark's account of the Black Hawk War ends with the conclusion of the war and Black Hawk's tour east to meet President Jackson as a prisoner of war. At least some note at the end as to what became of the Sauk and Mesquakie tribes would have put the war in perspective. The Mesquakie, for example, are alive and well in Tama, Iowa, from which they return each year to Rock Island for a Pow Wow in Black Hawk State Park.

Nevertheless, the book is largely accurate and readable. It belongs in the library of anyone interested in the Black Hawk War and in the libraries of cities and towns in the Black Hawk area. It should also find a place in high school libraries, for the bibliography, while not complete, is a good start, and the text provides a dependable, documented account of an interesting and important part of Illinois history.

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THE LINCOLN MURDER CONSPIRACIES. By William Hanchett. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983. Pp. 303. $18.50.

More has been written about Abraham Lincoln than about any other figure in American history. It is, therefore, difficult for the professional historian, even more so for the layman, to separate the wheat from the chaff. It is hard indeed to distinguish myth from reality. Hanchett aims to help us make these distinctions and to a large degree he has succeeded. To anyone interested in Lincoln as president this book is a must. The title, though, is misleading. Hanchett does focus on the assassination, to be sure, but he also analyzes the larger issues of Lincoln's presidency, especially public reaction to it. Some of the pages therefore retell a familiar story. But given the extended audience beyond his fellow scholars such repetition is unavoidable.

The whipping boy of Hanchett's book is Otto Eisenschiml's *Why Was Lincoln Murdered?* (1937). Put simply, Hanchett charges him with fraud, with claiming that Staunton and friends pulled off the assassination (and murder attempts on Grant and Seward) without any valid evidence to support such a claim. This reader is convinced of the case against Eisenschiml. One cannot write history, or convict of crime, on circumstantial evidence. Hanchett is a necessary corrective because historians who could have tackled the Eisenschiml thesis during the almost fifty years since its publication have ignored it. They have written, and re-written, almost everything about Lincoln's life except his death. Even such eminent Lincoln scholars as J. G. Randall — and more recently

Stephen B. Oates — skirt this controversial interpretation about Lincoln's murder and instead treat the tragedy, briefly, in a strictly narrative format. Withal, Hanchett warns us of the inherent limitations in his effort, or any attempt, to answer definitively the questions raised by the assassination. He cautions that the full story can never be told because the assassin himself, John Wilkes Booth, "never had his day in court, not even military court. . . ." "Had he lived to answer questions and explain his motivations," Hanchett believes, "much of the mystery of his murder conspiracy would have been dispelled, no matter whom he implicated or failed to implicate" (p. 245).

There are a few problems with the book's organization. The reader loses his focus early on by Hanchett's lengthy digressions on the subsequent fate of the conspirators. He details inordinately the issue of whether or not Mrs. Surrat's death sentence should have been commuted. I question if an entire chapter was necessary on the historiography of John Wilkes Booth. Instead, this chapter, entitled "They Hated—and Loved—John Wilkes Booth," could easily have been combined into the previous chapter, "The Assassination as a Simple Conspiracy." These are minor shortcomings. The author's style is concise and readable, his revisionism provocative, and the end-product a welcome addition to the voluminous, and often distorted, body of scholarship about Abraham Lincoln.

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CARL SANDBURG: GALESBURG AND BEYOND. By George Swank. Galesburg, Ill.: Copyright George Swank; Printed by Wagoner Printing Co., 1983. pp. 196.

This is the kind of book one browses in rather than reads. It is not in any sense a biography but a massive compilation of visual materials, accompanied by typescripts, many photocopied from newspaper and magazine articles about Sandburg's career. Mr. Swank began with the idea of about 50 pages, as a record of events honoring the poet, especially the 1967 memorial service and the 1978 centenary. But the project just grew and grew into a big book focused on the poet and his Galesburg but, as the title suggests, burgeoning to include the other places important in his life — Wisconsin, Chicago, Michigan, and North Carolina — and his parents, wife, children, cousins, friends, teachers, the people he commemorated (Lincoln) and those who commemorated him (Howard K. Smith, Fanny Butcher, Burl Ives) in a seemingly endless series of dedications and memorials both during his life and since.

For anyone interested in Sandburg's outward career, this book should

be a lasting fascination; almost every event, both trivial and significant is reflected here with equal emphasis. For example, the poet's account of his boyhood in *Always the Young Strangers* can be traced graphically in the people, places, and institutions of Galesburg. We see the pictures of the houses he lived in, his pals "The Dirty Dozen," his confirmation class, his football team. We can check his own description of his early experience at long-defunct Lombard College against Swank's account of its origin and growth and see pictures of Philip Green Wright, the dreamer-professor who deeply influenced the future poet and printed his first verse in the basement of his house. Besides showing us a picture of that house as it is today and telling us who lives in it now, Swank reproduces the illustrated covers of the three little Sandburg books printed in the Wright basement.

Swank's book is a huge collection of Sandburg memorabilia. There is a photocopy of the 1959 playbill for "The World of Carl Sandburg" starring Bette Davis and Gary Merrill, photos of Harriet Monroe and the contents page of her magazine *Poetry,* that featured for the first time in 1914 some of Sandburg's Chicago poems, the guest list of the Waldorf-Astoria party on Sandburg's 85th birthday, excerpts from Sandburg's address before a joint session of Congress — the list is inexhaustible. And on nearly every page are photos of the poet, who is shown in every stage of his life and in nearly every role, many of them taken by Sandburg's brother-in-law, the great photographer Edward Steichen (who himself appears in many photos, once in old age at Carl's funeral, on the arm of his beautiful young wife).

The impression that finally sticks is of Sandburg the public man. Barring presidents, he was possibly the most photographed man in America. We see the white-maned bard in every pose, sometimes with guitar and bandana, and appearing at innumerable formal commemorations and parties while he lived and presiding in spirit over just as many after his death. The sense of Sandburg returning to the birthplace hovers over the entire book. What is missing from Swank's book is simply the private poet, especially the elusive lyricist of the flux and drift of life, of the passing of youth and beauty, the poet full of uncertainty and doubt, obsessed by the death and possible oblivion of the individual, and trusting only in the indomitable life of the people. The more we see of the public personality, the easier it is for the soul of the poet to elude us.

Many of Swank's texts are apparently based on material in *Galvaland,* a magazine of west central Illinois that is published and edited by Swank himself. Many other texts are photocopied from newspaper and magazine articles, but exact documentation is sometimes neglected. This is a limitation for scholars who might wish to use the book. Nevertheless, for the layman who remembers the man or admires the poet, this stupendous, though sometimes stupefying, grabbag of riches will be a continuing pleasure. It must be noted, finally, that the near-folio size of the paperback volume is too large for the rather flimsy binding and soft-cover. It

comes apart unless handled with great care. I recommend the hard-cover edition.

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A READER'S GUIDE TO ILLINOIS LITERATURE. Edited by Robert Bray, et. al. Springfield: Office of the Illinois Secretary of State, 1985. Pp. xiii + 155.

When you pick up this book, you know that it is going to be handy; it is designed to be used. Its spiral binding, index tabs, 8½ by 11 size, and plain manila covers ask not to be revered but to be dogeared and pencil marked. In a prefatory comment, Jim Edgar, Illinois Secretary of State and State Librarian, writes that "The *Reader's Guide* was developed for readers and writers, teachers and students." It has achieved its goal of being useful to a wide and diverse audience, for everyone from university researchers to junior high report writers should be able to learn from its essays and be guided to further material by its bibliographies. In noting that the *Reader's Guide* is "the first of its kind for Illinois," Mr. Edgar further states that it "will undoubtedly serve as the basis from which the study and enjoyment of Illinois literature will grow." I second the motion. And the sooner this book is in the hands of readers, especially teachers, the sooner we will begin to appreciate more fully and deeply the rich literary heritage of Illinois and its continuing vitality.

The *Reader's Guide* consists of five essays and a supplementary bibliography. Each essay is a chapter: Nonfiction by John Hallwas, Fiction to 1915 by Robert Bray, Fiction Since 1915 by James Hurt, Poetry by John Knoepfle, and Illinois Women and Their Literature by Babette Inglehart. With the exception of Inglehart's essay on women, each chapter contains a substantial annotated bibliography — though the poetry bibliography is brief. Inglehart's essay is an abridged version of a longer work in progress, and because of space limitations the publication of her annotated bibliography has been postponed to a future date. When it appears, it should be the single most complete list of titles by and about Illinois women.

The last section of the *Reader's Guide*, Supplementary Bibliographies, comprises almost one-third of this book, pages 107-155. It is divided into four principal parts: European Ethnics, The Afro-American Experience, Hispanics, and Juvenile Works. I was surprised by the length of the list of juvenile works (one-half of the total Supplementary Bibliographies section) but not by the fact that eleven ethnic groups have contributed to the melting pot of the literature of Illinois and Chicago. Read the "Preface" to the Supplementary Bibliographies to be alerted to its strengths and

weaknesses. Note that a focus upon fiction slights poetry, drama, and essays, and that native American and Asian works are not included.

In his general Introduction, editor Robert Bray takes pains to insist that this *Reader's Guide* is not a comprehensive literary history of Illinois; it is "limited and provisional" and perhaps best thought of as a "sourcebook" rather than a textbook. Taken in this spirit, the *Reader's Guide* is an outstanding first step. I quite like it. It has some warts which, Bray acknowledges, come from its approach to the subject. The five authors "have tried to avoid the sort of bland continuity found in most textbooks," and have tried to make their "case for Illinois literature without any overarching interpretive framework." They have succeeded; the essays are not bland. But as I was reading the book, I often wished that someone were tying the threads together. In the future, we do need some theory or some vision of continuity for Illinois literature.

At the same time, I wouldn't ever want to trade in this first edition of the *Reader's Guide* because it is exactly the peculiarity of each author's voice and perspective which gives this volume its value. Later editions may improve, through research, the bibliographies, but these authors' statements about how they now see a portion of Illinois literature should retain the integrity of their perceptions for a long time to come. So, even though I wish there were a separate section on drama (witness how vital the theater is today in Chicago) and more uniformity of approach by the authors (one chapter is organized by geography, one by genre, others by topics), I wouldn't want to lose these distinctly different perspectives which we now have.

Though many may only use *A Reader's Guide to Illinois Literature* for its bibliographies and profit accordingly, they will miss the pleasure of reading the essays and discovering that reading about Illinois literature can be as interesting and delightful as it is informative. This is the first official government publication that I've ever enjoyed reading, and it's free to boot.

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